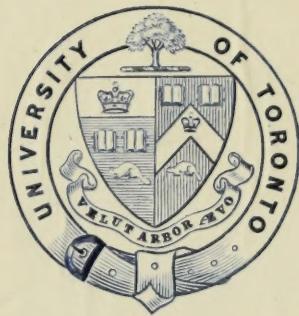


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The Octocentenary
of Reading Abbey.



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THE OCTOCENTENARY
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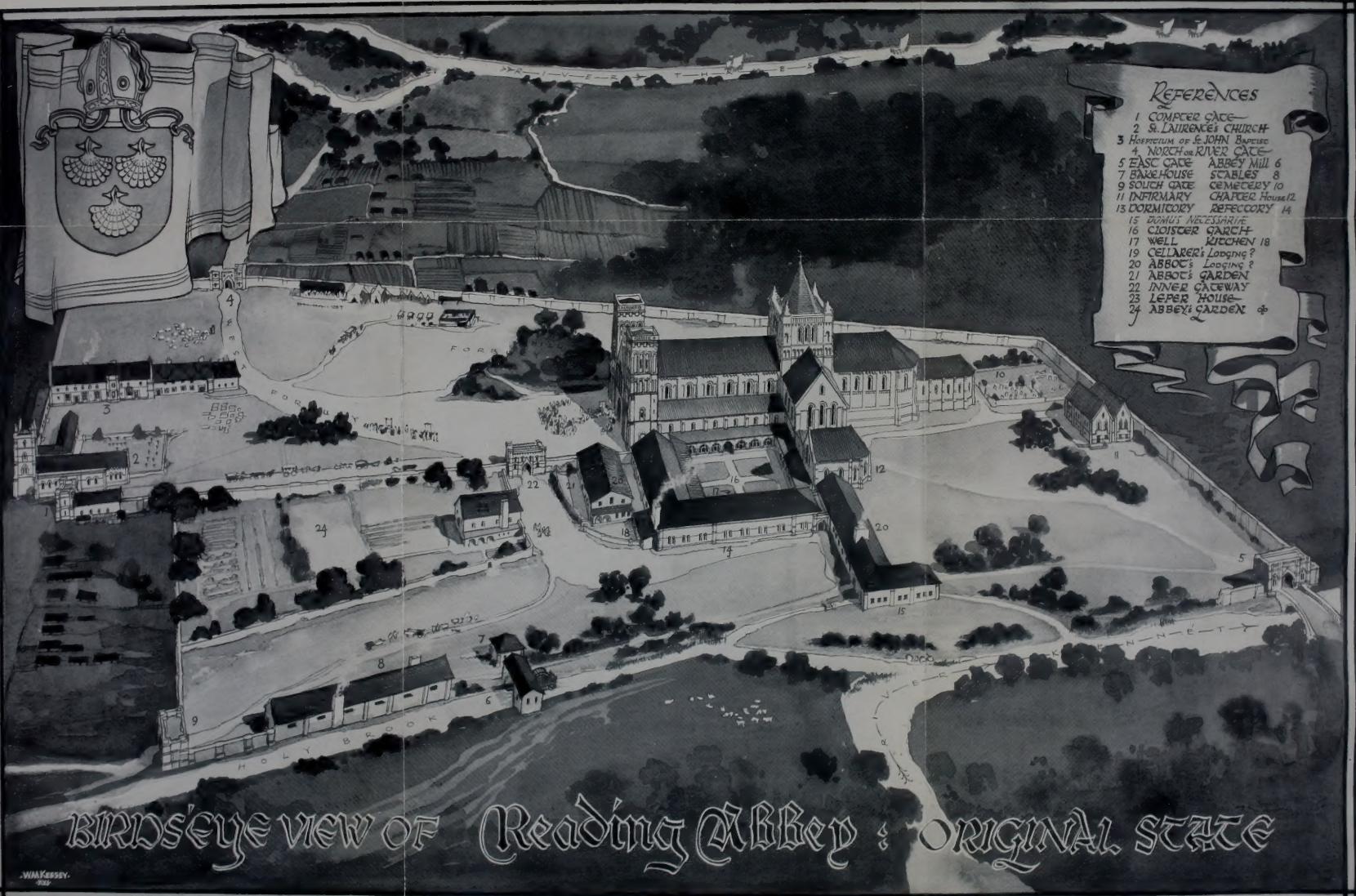
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- 21 ABBOT'S GARDEN
- 22 INNER GATEWAY
- 23 LEPER HOUSE
- 24 ABBEY GARDEN

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF READING ABBEY IN ORIGINAL STATE



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF

WM KERSEY.
1888

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The Octocentenary of Reading Abbey

A.D. 1121—A.D. 1921

By
JAMIESON B. HURRY, M.A., M.D.

Illustrated

LONDON : ELLIOT STOCK
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1921

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In Honour
of
Henry Beauclerc, King of England,
who founded Reading Abbey
on June 18, 1121,
and was buried before its High Altar
on January 4, 1136.

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The Prologue

EIGHT hundred years have rolled by since the great Norman King Henry Beauclerc laid the foundations of the “Noble and Royal Monastery of Reading,” which he dedicated for ever to the glory of God and the service of man. This famous Foundation was for centuries the home of spiritual worship and Christian benevolence. Within the aisles of the minster the voices of saintly men by day and by night were pealing heavenward in intercession for the sins of mankind, while at the gate hovered the angel of mercy ministering to the pilgrim, to the poor, to the leper.

This noble *domus Dei* has been a benediction to Radingia, a witness of inimitable beauty, keeping watch and ward over the little burgh, raising the thoughts of the burghers from the material to the spiritual, from the temporal to the eternal. The Abbey has contributed to the progress of education, of literature, of art, of commerce, bringing the life of the burgh into touch with the life of the nation, and giving birth to such memories as rank amongst the priceless possessions of a community. On the other hand we cannot forget how that *grand Seigneur*, the Lord Abbot, sadly thwarted the aspirations of the burghers for political and religious liberty, and for many a long year turned a deaf ear to legitimate appeals for their birthright of freedom and self-government.

The Abbey has not only rendered invaluable services to Radingia; it has played a worthy part on the stage of our national history. Here were celebrated royal marriages

The Prologue

and funerals ; here gathered great secular and ecclesiastical councils ; here on various occasions assembled Parliament itself. Speaking generally the Abbots of Reading were men of learning and experience, competent to advise on affairs of the State and to confer with the Sovereign of the realm. At least two of them were noted for their contributions to literature and theology. One was raised to the dignity of Archbishop of Rouen ; another became Archbishop of Bordeaux ; a third reached the Abbacy of Cluny itself. The monastic Library was a nursery of theological, linguistic, historical and musical studies, and enjoyed such public confidence as to be entrusted with the custody of State archives. The Hospitium was far-famed as one of the most frequented guest houses in the land, and possessed an importance that is not easily realised under the changed conditions of modern times.

Doubtless during the long history of the Abbey there were at times abuses and scandals, such as have stained the memory of many a religious house. Where in this world can gold be found that is free from dross ? The real ever falls short of the ideal. But, speaking generally, the Founder's lofty aims were realised ; he planted a tree that bore good fruit.

To-day little remains but ivy-clad, weather-stained ruins. The fire is extinguished on the altar, the voice of prayer and thanksgiving is silent, the music is hushed in the choir. Abbot, prior, cantor, sacrist, monk have made their *exit* for ever. But the part played by the Abbey in the making of England and of Reading will be held in perpetual remembrance. Its record will abide even when eroding time has removed the last vestiges of that *chef d'œuvre* of architecture which Henry Beauclerc dedicated to the worship of the Almighty, and in which he found his final resting-place.

The eight hundredth birthday appears a suitable occasion for a brief account of a long and eventful history. Much

The Prologue

of the following material has already appeared either in volumes that are out of print or in somewhat inaccessible journals. Hence the collection, under one cover, of scattered papers may be of some service in recalling the story of an institution which has contributed its share in the building up of the dear homeland.

No systematic account however of the architecture, the history, or the many-sided activities of a great mediæval Abbey will be attempted. Readers seeking such information are referred to special monographs, where bibliographical references will also be found.

Most of the illustrations (Plates iii.-ix.) are reproduced, by permission of the Reading Corporation, from a series of oil paintings exhibited in the Municipal Art Gallery; they will assist the reader in reconstructing in imagination some of the incidents in the annals of the Abbey. The Frontispiece has been drawn by Mr. W. M. Keesey, under the supervision of Mr. W. Ravenscroft, F.S.A. Messrs. Nisbet & Co., Ltd., have kindly permitted the reproduction of the portrait of King Henry I.

J. B. H.

WESTFIELD,
READING.



†

A Royal Founder

"Strenuus pacis amator et ecclesie defensor."

Ordericus Vitalis

THE reign of Henry I. (Fig. ii.) marks an era in English history and may be studied from many points of view. Only a few remarks as to its social and religious aspects can be attempted here.

By the beginning of the twelfth century the momentous changes brought about by the Conquest were being consolidated throughout the breadth of the land, the two constituent elements of the English people—native and Norman—being gradually fused into one harmonious whole. Henry Beauclerc was singularly well fitted to promote this all-important blending on which the happiness of the people depended, and which progressed so rapidly that he has been described as "the re-founder of the English nation." He earnestly sought the welfare of his subjects, more especially of the poorer and defenceless amongst them. His administration of justice was even-handed as regards race or rank, and gave a sense of security from wrong that had been little known under his predecessors. Another great blessing which he conferred on the Kingdom was peace; well was he called the "lover of peace," the "great and glorious father of his country." The last

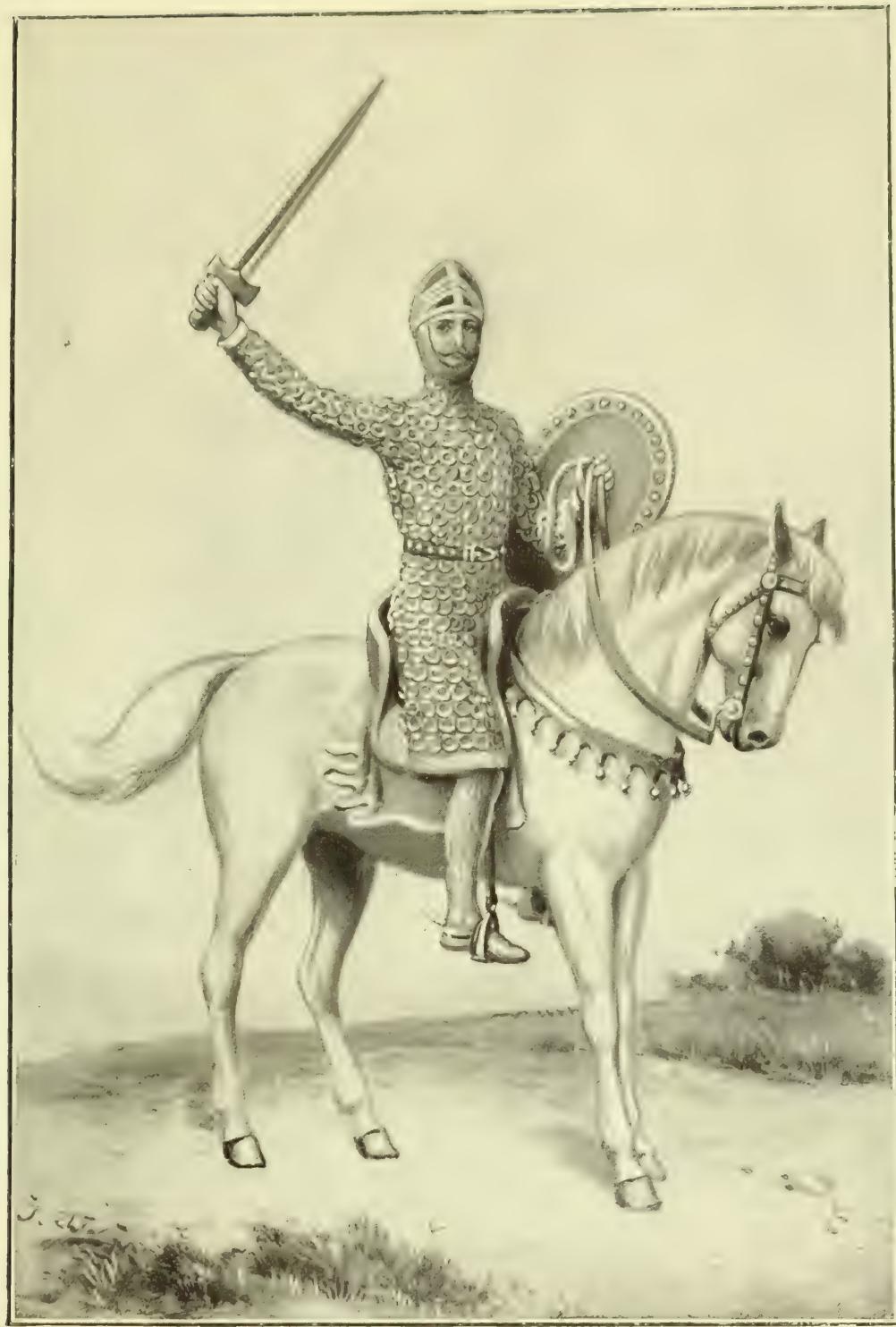


Fig. ii.—King Henry Beauclerc.

A Royal Founder

words he spoke on this earth were an injunction to keep the peace and protect the poor.

Furthermore, his reign was signalised by a great movement towards moral and religious reform, the first indeed of a series of waves of spiritual awakening which at irregular intervals have spread over this country during the past centuries. In spite of his personal licentiousness and many other faults, King Henry was not without sympathy with this spiritual movement, and on numerous occasions he showed his interest both in charitable and religious activities. To both churches and religious houses he was a liberal benefactor, while the clergy were treated with great respect. Some of his charities may have been born of contrition, but at least they were evidence of a tender conscience.

The Cluniac branch of the Benedictine order aroused his particular interest, as it had done that of William the Conqueror. Thus he generously contributed to the vast basilica that was being erected at Cluny, and accorded his special protection to the priory of St. Pancras at Lewes, the headquarters of the Cluniacs in England. Amongst various indications of a sympathy for suffering was his solicitude for the outcast and despised lepers ; there was also a royal liberality to pilgrims and especially to the military orders in Palestine. By far the most important of his benefactions however was conferred on Radingia, the early name for Reading, when, on June 18th, 1121, in the twenty-first year of his reign, he laid the foundations of the Abbey which was destined to win an immortal place in English and indeed in European history.

i. The Founding of the Abbey

The monastic chroniclers do not tell us why the royal choice fell upon Radingia. Was it its charming situation near the confluence of the Thames and the Kennet, com-

Octocentenary of Reading Abbey

manding a beautiful view of adjacent hill and dale? Was it the proximity to a great highway to the West along which flocked innumerable travellers and pilgrims for whom no adequate hostelry for rest and refreshment existed? Was it that the mighty Conqueror had already held Reading in demesne and had shown his affection for the royal burgh by associating its church with Battle Abbey? Possibly combined attractions made this the most eligible of sites.

The story of the royal Foundation is of singular interest. A famous relic, the reputed hand of St. James, had come into the possession of Henry Beauclerc, who, overjoyed at his good fortune, determined to build a splendid home of religion worthy of so great an Apostle.

The King also intended the Abbey to be a memorial of himself and his family, and linked with it the names of those nearest and dearest to him. In the words of his Foundation Charter the Abbey was founded "for the salvation of my soul, and of King William my Father, and of King William my Brother, and of William my Son, and Queen Maud my Mother, and Queen Maud my Wife, and of all my ancestors and successors." His attachment to the Abbey is further shown by its selection as the place of his sepulture. No wonder that the royal treasury was freely drawn upon, so that the memorial might be one of unrivalled magnificence.

Not only did Henry wish that the Abbey should be a noble foundation, endowed with temporal privileges and powers; it must also become a home of spiritual worship and Christian benevolence. With this intent he sent to Cluny, a noted centre of religion and learning, with a request that some of its brethren might be spared to establish a similar monastery at Reading. Accordingly Peter, the Prior of Cluny, with seven of his brethren, crossed over from France and, aided by some brethren from St. Pancras, at Lewes, the Cluniac headquarters in England, started operations. First of all the precincts were staked out and

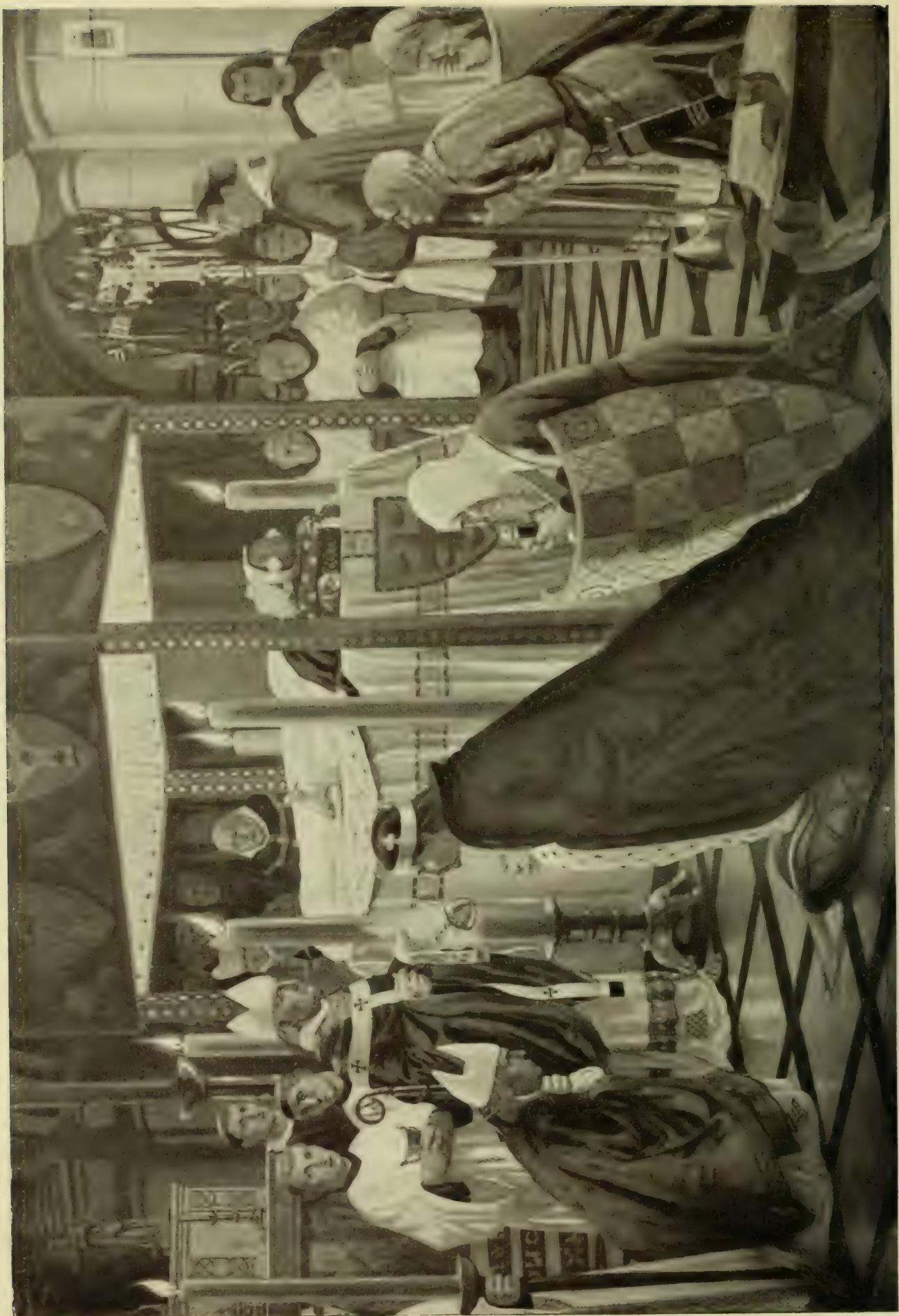


FIG. iii.—The Burial of King Henry Beaufort.

A Royal Founder

the site cleared. By the 18th of June, 1121, all was ready, and Henry Beauclerc, in the presence of his successor Stephen and of many of his barons, laid the foundations of the *domus Dei* to which he became so warmly attached. Soon followed an army of skilled craftsmen, masons, carpenters, plumbers, glass-makers.

After two years of patient labour, building operations were sufficiently advanced for the organisation of the monastery, and this task was entrusted to Hugh de Boves, a saintly and learned man who had already proved an able administrator. A close friendship sprang up between the Abbot and his royal patron, a friendship that only terminated with the King's death. Two years later the Abbey received its Foundation Charter which was probably signed at Rouen on March 29th, 1125.

ii. The Death of the Founder

Henry Beauclerc lived for fourteen years after founding the Abbey, and watched with deep interest the gradual rise, stone upon stone, of the stately memorial which he had designed. He breathed his last on Sunday, December 1st, 1135, at the Castle of Lyons-la-Forêt, about forty miles from Rouen (Fig. iii.).*

The previous Tuesday, November 26th, on returning from the chase, he had halted at Lyons-la-Forêt, in order to enjoy some lampreys, a fish which invariably provoked dyspepsia, and was therefore forbidden by his physicians.

* Fig. iii., entitled "The Burial of King Henry Beauclerc," is reproduced from a painting by Mr. Harry Morley, and represents the funeral ceremony in the chancel of the Church, the royal bier surmounted by an effigy of the dead monarch being seen in the centre of the picture.

In the foreground is King Stephen as chief mourner, with William Warren, Earl of Surrey, on his left and two other knights beside him. Near the foot of the bier stands the Archbishop of Canterbury, with Roger, Bishop of Salisbury, on his right. Seated on his throne in the chancel is Edward, the Abbot of Reading.

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But alas, it is true of royal as of ordinary mortals : " We always want what is forbidden, and crave for what is refused."

The meal of lampreys was followed by sudden and violent illness, accompanied by a high temperature and acute suffering, due doubtless to peritonitis. As soon as his sickness began, the King made his confession to his private chaplains. In that hour of agony however he longed for the presence and spiritual comfort of his old friend and *protégé* Hugh de Boves, whom he had known so well at Reading, and who had since been raised to the Archbishopric of Rouen.

Hugh hastened to the death-bed of his beloved patron and sovereign. Confessor and penitent spent the last three days together. The Archbishop urged the dying man to purge his conscience of all his sins, and persuaded him to release all criminals from their forfeitures, to recall the nobles he had exiled, to restore their property to those who had been disinherited, and to bequeath charitable gifts to the poor. As the illness made rapid progress the King received absolution from his confessor, and thus strengthened by the Viaticum and extreme Unction passed into the unseen world.

The following letter written to Pope Innocent II. describes the royal death-bed :

" Hugh, Bishop of Rouen, sends his humble service to his Lord and Father, Pope Innocent :

" We think it our duty to announce to you the death of our Lord and King, and do so with the deepest sorrow. Attacked by sudden illness the King summoned us by an urgent message, as he wished to have us near by so that we might comfort him. Accordingly we came and remained with him during three days—a time of great suffering. We assisted him to confess his sins, and he beat his breast, in the deepest contrition, laid aside all

A Royal Founder

animosities and promised to amend his life according to the will of God and of the Church. After receiving this promise more than once confirmed, I gave him absolution three times during those three days. He devoutly adored the Cross of our Lord and received His Body and Blood. He disposed of his charitable gifts with the words: 'Let my debts be paid, all wages and stipends be discharged, and the remainder distributed to the poor.' Would to God that all who have possessed or still possess riches might act as he did !

" Meanwhile I carefully explained to him the teaching of the Church about the anointing of the sick, received from the blessed Apostle St. James, and at his own pious request I anointed him with holy oil. So he rested in peace, and may God grant him the peace that he loved."

The day after the King's death, Monday, December 2nd, the nobles who had been present at the death-bed, bore the corpse all the way to the Cathedral of Rouen, relieving each other at intervals when tired. Twenty thousand men-at-arms joined in the procession, all eager to show honour to the obsequies. At the Cathedral door the corpse was received with the greatest respect, men and women of every rank shedding floods of tears during the service.

After embalming the body was sewn in a bull's hide, and transported by road across the breadth of Normandy to Caen, where the bier was placed in the Abbey Church of St. Stephen, by the side of the tomb of Henry's father the Conqueror.

The crossing of the Channel was delayed for nearly four weeks by stormy weather ; but immediately after Christmas the body was placed on board ship by monks and transported to London.

On arrival on British soil the body was received with all respect by King Stephen, Warrenne, Earl of Surrey, and four other Earls who escorted it to Reading, King Stephen

Octocentenary of Reading Abbey

himself helping to carry the bier on his shoulders for the love he bore to his uncle. No spot could be more suitable for the last resting-place of the "almost perfect model of a King" than before the high altar of the great Minster which he had built to the glory of God.

There he was laid to rest on the feast of the Epiphany, January 4th, 1136, the anniversary of his own birthday. Amongst those present were King Stephen, William of Corbeil, Archbishop of Canterbury, and various Bishops and nobles of the Realm. Taking part in the service was doubtless the recently appointed Abbot Edward with the obedientiaries and brethren. From near and far flocked the villeins and bordars with their wives, all eager to witness the funeral rites of the King who had so greatly honoured Radingia by placing there his famous Abbey, and by choosing it for his sepulchre. Probably the only persons excluded from the Church were the lepers occupying the recently built hospital, close to the great west porch. But even they must have enjoyed watching the funeral procession passing in front of their hospital.

The vast Abbey Church was still in an unfinished condition. But the choir no doubt was complete and supplied a fitting background for such a national event as a royal funeral. The stately ritual of the Roman Church added to the impressiveness of the ceremony. Was it not the first native King of the English who was being carried to his last resting-place?

An ancient chronicler, Florence of Worcester, referring to the funeral, tells us that masses were sung, many rich offerings made and alms distributed to multitudes of the poor.

Happy, thrice happy, are the citizens of Reading, that within the precincts of their ancient Borough lies a spot which will for ever be sacred in the history of England, a spot to which the boys and girls can be led with the words : "Here was buried King Henry Beauclerc, the lover of peace, the lion of justice, the glorious father of his country!"



ii

A Royal Foundation

“Nobile et regale monasterium de Redynge.”

Annales de Bermundeseia

THE foundation of Reading Abbey is thus recorded by the ancient chronicler, William of Malmesbury : “Henry I. built this monastery between the rivers Kennet and Thames, in a spot calculated for the reception of almost all who might have occasion to travel to the more populous cities of England, where he placed monks of the Cluniac order, who are at this day a noble pattern of holiness and an example of unwearied and delightful hospitality.”

The Abbey (Frontispiece) consisted of a group of conventional buildings clustering round a sumptuous church, and encircled by a massive wall on three sides and by two streams, the Kennet and the Holy Brook, on the fourth.

Four embattled Gateways admitted into these precincts. The principal or compter Gateway extended across what is now the Forbury to St. Laurence’s Church, and through it passed the royal and other visitors who would see before them the imposing central tower and west façade of the monastic Church. Of the three less important Gateways the North or River Gate led down to the Thames ; the East Gate faced what is now Blake’s bridge over the Kennet ;

Octocentenary of Reading Abbey

while the South Gate stood on the north bank of the Holy Brook close to the spot now occupied by the Abbey Hall.

The space included within these boundaries was divided by a wall into a large and public court known as the Forbury, and into one more strictly reserved for the monks. Access from one court to the other was gained through what is known as the Inner Gateway, which happily is still standing.

The Church

The Church was a romanesque cruciform structure distinguished both for its vast dimensions and for its beauty of detail (Fig. iv.).* It consisted of a central nave with lateral aisles, and two transepts, each of them divided into apsidal chapels. The east end, forming the head of the cross, terminated with the apse and ambulatory, the latter being formed by the prolongation of the aisles. Thus was provided the processional path by which pilgrims to the shrine of St. James could pass behind the chancel.

The roof of the nave was carried by a double series of eight piers, supporting semi-circular arches. From the intersection of the transepts and nave sprang a massive central tower. Further to the east was placed the Lady Chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

As regards the interior of the Church nothing was grudged that could enhance the splendour of its decoration

* Fig. iv., entitled "The Consecration of the Abbey Church," is from a painting by Mr. Stephen Reid, and represents the dedication ceremony actually in progress.

In the foreground stands Archbishop Thomas à Becket wearing his traditional mitre, with his cross-bearer Alexander Llewelyn just behind. On the steps of the chancel is seen King Henry II., holding the sword of State. On the left stands Roger, Abbot of Reading, while behind the cross-bearer is the Bishop of Peterborough. Two other prelates, those of Durham and London, are peering over the left shoulder of the Archbishop. In the dim background beyond the high altar is seen the tomb of the Founder of the Abbey.



Fig. iv.—The Consecration of the Abbey Church by Thomas à Becket.

A Royal Foundation

or the beauty of its ritual. Stained glass, gorgeous tapestries, embroideries of the most tasteful design and colour, were all made use of, the walls being probably covered with frescoes.

The vessels used at the high altar were of pure gold. One chalice alone, with its paten, weighed four pounds, and was worth over £50. Amongst the other treasures was a gold shrine for carrying relics, adorned with sapphires, pearls and other precious stones. There were also valuable pixes, reliquaries, crosses, mitres, embroidered copes, chasubles and priceless works of art, some of them gifts from royal and other visitors to the Church.

The sacristy or treasury in which were kept the ecclesiastical vestments as well as the sacramental vessels probably occupied the slype between the south transept and the Chapter House.

As regards the altars, tombs and chapels in the Abbey little is known, except the fact that the Founder, King Henry I., was buried before the high altar ("in ipsa ecclesia ante altare sepultum est").

The Cloisters

The Cloisters,¹ placed on the south of the nave, formed a square covered ambulatory, measuring about 145 feet each way. They leant against the adjacent buildings, and were supported on the inner side by an open trellis, showing beauty of design and workmanship. The east Cloister still remains, although in a ruined condition, and is approached under a semi-circular arch through which the monks entered the Church. These Cloisters afforded sheltered communication between the Church, the Chapter House, the Dormitory, the Refectory and other buildings, and in them the monks spent much of their time during the interval between the religious services.

Octocentenary of Reading Abbey

The Chapter House

The Chapter House occupied the east side of the Cloisters, and, although stripped of its finished mason-work, remains to this day a noble monument of its ancient magnificence. It measured 79 by 42 feet, and had a barrel vault supported by eight pilasters 20 feet in height. The total elevation of the hall was about 40 feet. The west end was arranged in the usual Benedictine fashion with a central door, flanked by two large windows, with three windows above. The stone benches on which sat the monks may still be traced along either side, while at the east end were seats for the Abbot, Prior and Sub-Prior. Doubtless the windows were filled with stained glass and the walls painted with frescoes, but no vestige of these remains.

This Chapter House was one of the largest and finest in England, and within its walls were held some of the Parliaments, Ecclesiastical Councils and other important gatherings recorded in history.

The daily chapter formed an important event in the routine of the monastery, and was summoned by the tolling of the great bell after morning mass. All the monks were obliged to attend, the Abbot presiding. First was read the martyrology of the day, after which notices were given out, and the *tabula* or list of duties announced. When the Abbot thought well, a suitable discourse was made, and any needful punishments inflicted, preceded, as occasion required, by confession.

The Dormitory

The Dormitory or Dorts probably occupied the long building running south from the Chapter House. It measured about 150 feet and was raised on an undercroft, which was probably occupied by the common room and other monastic offices. The Dorts was reached by means

A Royal Foundation

of a door leading out of the cloister, and in the wall may still be seen the stairs used by the monks attending the night office.

The beds were arranged in one long row and consisted of a straw mattress, blanket, coverlet and pillow. Hay or rushes were strewn along the floor, while a mat probably stretched the whole length of the room. Strict silence was observed and a light burnt all night long. By half-past seven in the winter and half-past eight in the summer all the monks retired to bed, and thus brought to an end the busy round of duties that filled up the monastic day.

The Refectory

The Refectory formed an imposing hall on the south side of the Cloisters, and measured about 167 by 38 feet. Within its walls various historic assemblies have taken place. On one occasion the Rolls of Parliament describe it as "a certain apartment within the Abbey, prepared for the purpose, the King [*i.e.* Edward IV.] seated on a royal throne, and the three estates in full Parliament assembled."

On one side of the Refectory was placed the pulpit from which portions of Scripture were read during meals, so that the mind might be sustained with spiritual food while the body took in physical nourishment.

The Infirmary

Little is known of the Infirmary at Reading, although it was doubtless an extensive building, if we may judge from similar institutions at other important monasteries. Even the situation is uncertain, although tradition points to the site now occupied by the Reading Gaol, where ancient foundations were dug out some years ago. Such buildings were usually placed well apart from the rest of the monastic

Octocentenary of Reading Abbey

establishment so that the sick might be as undisturbed as possible. There would probably be a dormitory, refectory, kitchen, chapel and hall. St. Benedict laid special stress on the importance of caring for the sick brethren: "Before and above all other things care must be taken of the sick, so that they may be served as if they were Christ Himself, for He saith: 'I was sick, and ye visited Me.'"

The Infirmary was placed in charge of the infirmarian, who was specially selected for his gentleness and his sympathy.

The Leper House

The Leper House dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene was built by Abbot Aucherius in 1134. The length was 110 feet, the width 50 feet, while the largest apartment measured 60 feet by 45.

Many interesting details are extant of the food, clothing and regulations of the inmates of this lazarus-house. Shaking their wooden cop and clapper they used to beg for alms with the words: "Sum good, my gentyll mayster, for God sake."

The Inner Gateway

The Inner Gateway is the best preserved portion of the Abbey, and forms a striking example of medieval architecture. The first floor is occupied by a stately hall in which the Abbot held his manorial court. Here used to assemble the Guild Merchant when once a year it presented three of its members to the Abbot, asking him to nominate one of them to be the Custos Gilde or Mayor. Here too Hugh Faringdon, the last Abbot, was condemned to die the death of a traitor, martyred for defending the Church against the Crown.

A Royal Foundation

The Hospitium of St. John

Reading was noted for the hospitality of its monks. According to William of Malmesbury "guests might be seen arriving every hour, and consumed more than the inmates themselves." This lavish hospitality was exercised in a special building known as the Hospitium and placed on the west side of the monastery. Not only was the practice of hospitality and of charity a great principle of Benedictine monasteries, but the Foundation Charter of Reading Abbey expressly enjoined that "Whoever shall be made Abbot shall not bestow the alms of the monastery on his lay kindred or other persons, but use them for the entertainment of the poor and strangers."

The monks were rich in compassion and relieved all who sought their assistance. Their hospitality was no respecter of persons, the guest house being open to all for refreshment or lodging. "Toutes les misères trouvèrent un soulagement dans cette riche et puissante maison de Reading."

The original guest house erected by Henry Beauclerc probably adjoined St. Laurence's Church. In course of time however this building became inadequate for the great concourse of travellers and pilgrims, and so it came to pass that when Hugh II. became Abbot, he found it necessary between 1189 and 1193 to rebuild this Hospitium on a much larger scale. In it were provided a series of halls and chambers devoted to the entertainment of guests, and an eleemosynary department for the relief of the poor. Its three principal divisions were (a) a Residence house for twenty-six poor brethren and sisters, (b) a Refectory and (c) a Dormitory. By this means hospitality could be provided for the vast concourse of travellers and pilgrims who visited the Abbey as described by Malmesbury.

The Abbey, of which the most important departments

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have been briefly alluded to, was built on a scale of great magnificence. It was indeed a worthy home for brethren whose life was devoted to prayer and labour. It carried on the high traditions inherited from the noble mother Abbey of Cluny, whose spiritual fervour, missionary enthusiasm and intellectual culture, in the words of Pope Urbanus II., "illuminated the earth like a second sun."



iii

Some Notable Abbots

Romanae magni fuerunt servi ecclesiae.

THIRTY-ONE abbots ruled over the Abbey during the more than four hundred years that intervened between its foundation and its dissolution. They were as a rule men of influence and distinction. Some were militant ecclesiastics and gained high office in the Church ; others possessed scholarship ; others devoted their energies to the charitable side of the monastic life ; yet others enjoyed prestige in the councils of the realm ; at least two were special favourites with the sovereign on the throne. Space will only allow of an account of the first, the eighth and the thirty-first Abbot, Hugh de Boves, Hugh II. and the martyr Hugh Cook Faringdon.

i. Hugh de Boves

Hugh de Boves, a man “ *fide et bonis operibus plenus*,” *full of faith and good works*, was appointed first Abbot of Reading on April 15th, 1123. The choice was doubtless made by King Henry himself, who had known Hugh for some years, and selected him as the man most likely to organise efficiently the splendid Abbey that was being

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erected at Reading, and to make it a home of Christian worship and benevolence.

Hugh de Boves, a descendant of the Counts of Amiens, and sometimes called Hugues III. d'Amiens, was born at Laon and educated under Anselm, one of the celebrated theologians of the day. Although liberally endowed with this world's goods, Hugh preferred a monastic career with its leisure for study and good works. Accordingly he took monastic vows and entered the Abbey of Cluny, renowned all the world over for the piety and prestige of its Abbots and for the boundless hospitality and missionary enthusiasm of its brethren. Hugh was certainly at Cluny from 1099 to 1113, and won golden opinions from his superiors. "Nous n'avons point oublié," wrote Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, to him some years later, "combien votre érudition et votre piété ont fait d'honneur à ce grand et saint troupeau de Cluny." This high reputation led to his appointment in 1113 as Prior of St. Martial's at Limoges, one of the daughter houses of Cluny, where his zeal attracted the attention of King Henry I., at whose express wish he was soon afterwards promoted to be Prior of St. Pancras, at Lewes, in the diocese of Chichester, the headquarters of the Cluniacs in England. His arrival on English soil gave the King opportunities for a closer acquaintance, and a high opinion was formed of the Prior's character and learning.

The reigning family of England since the days of the Conquest had shown a high regard for Cluny. William the Conqueror begged its Abbot to come over and govern the religious affairs of England, and a spiritual mission was sent in response under the guidance of Warmond, a monk of Cluny. Rufus showered benefactions on the Cluniac house at Bermondsey. Henry Beauclerc was a most liberal contributor to the great basilica of St. Peter and St. Paul at Cluny and accorded his special protection to the Priory of St. Pancras at Lewes. No wonder that in the selection

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of a head for his favourite Abbey at Reading, Cluny was not forgotten.

Meanwhile Peter, the Prior of Cluny, with seven brethren, aided by some monks from St. Pancras, was busily engaged in designing and building the Abbey at Reading. As soon as this had advanced sufficiently for occupation, Prior Peter returned to Cluny, and the organisation was entrusted by the King to the learned and saintly Prior of St. Pancras, who became the first Abbot of Reading.

The fame of the new Abbot and doubtless also the favour shown to the monastery by King Henry soon attracted other brethren, who became inspired with the same spiritual fervour as was their head. Small wonder that under such an Abbot the brethren of Reading became famous for the sanctity of their life and for their self-sacrificing devotion to the "entertainment of the poor and the stranger."

Unhappily Hugh was not allowed to remain at the head of the Abbey for many years, for, on the death of Archbishop Geoffroi le Breton, he was, much against his will and greatly to the regret of the brethren at Reading, elected to the See of Rouen. For permission to accept this appointment the consent of the Bishop of Salisbury (in whose diocese Reading then was), of the King and of Pope Honorius II. had to be obtained. The necessary permission however was granted in due course, and early in September 1130 the King took Hugh with him to Normandy, visiting the Abbey of Bec, and then proceeding to Rouen, where Hugh was consecrated Archbishop on September 14th, 1130, in the Cathedral of St. Ouen, the officiating prelates being the Bishop of Bayeux and other bishops of the province.

Even after being made Archbishop, Hugh continued to live according to the monastic rule, and, in order to help him, chose three of his former Reading colleagues, Helias, Ausgerius and Victor, to be his chaplains at Rouen.

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King Henry well knew what a power for good could be wielded by the Archbishop on the political and religious affairs of Normandy, and at that critical period doubtless wished that so strong and religious a man as Hugh should occupy the office. In his province the new Archbishop proved a vigorous administrator, doing his best to keep the turbulent Abbots of Normandy under control. Hitherto those Abbots held that they owed no obedience to any metropolitan, and Henry Beauclerc supported them in their claim and actually wrote a letter to the Pope pleading their cause. This led to a violent quarrel, for Hugh was jealous of episcopal prerogatives, and although baffled for a long time he eventually succeeded in exacting an oath of obedience to himself as the metropolitan. Hugh also took a strenuous part with Pope Innocent II. in the celebrated conflict against the Anti-pope Anacletus, and entertained that Pope as well as King Henry as his guests at Rouen in 1131.

Two important ecclesiastical Councils were held about this period, one at Rheims in 1131 and one at Pisa in 1135, at which vital questions of theology and ethics were discussed. At the former Hugh took an active part as representative of the King of England, while after that at Pisa he was appointed Papal legate in Italy. But these great functions were not allowed to interfere with the business of his province, into which he threw himself with amazing vigour, and there is abundant evidence of the wisdom and lofty ideals that characterised his rule. As a reward for these services the archiepiscopal authority of Hugh and his successors was considerably extended by the Pope, while some fresh endowments were added to the See.

In December 1135 passed away his beloved patron and sovereign Henry Beauclerc, who had retained his confidence in Hugh in spite of many divergencies of view both in politics and religion.

After the death of King Henry, Hugh espoused the

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cause of Stephen, and gave strenuous support to the government. But for the most part he was kept busy in Normandy, although he came over for the coronation of Henry II. at Westminster in 1154. He died on November 10th, 1164, after holding the see of Rouen for thirty-four years "honeste et viriliter," and was buried in the Cathedral of that city.

Perhaps his character may be best summarised by the fragment of a distich which was probably applied to him by a contemporary :

"Amor plebis, tremor Hugo potentum,
Clarus avis, clarus studiis, recreator egentum."

Hugh de Boves wrote some important theological works which have been reprinted in Migne's "Patrologiæ Cursus," and throw much light on the ecclesiastical history of the Church in the twelfth century and on the duties of a hard-working bishop. Amongst those works are the "Dialogorum seu Quaestionum Theologicarum Libri Septem," a work which at one time was widely read, and which is of interest for the reason that six out of the seven books were written at Reading Abbey. The literary history of this town may therefore be said to have begun with its first Abbot.

ii. Hugh 33.

Hugh II., "vir magnae religionis et honestatis vitae," *a man noted for his religious zeal and high character*, was appointed Abbot of Reading in 1180, and filled that office for nineteen years.

According to Lorain, he was connected with the family of Anjou and therefore of noble birth; hence in after years he became known as Hugh d'Anjou. As a youth he bore an excellent character, and received a religious education at Cluny itself. At what age he took monastic vows at Reading is not known, but his tenure of office was one of great distinction.

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Leland says that he was "a skilful divine, from education and diligence in his studies; and that in the course of his reading he produced many elaborate observations upon subjects which were abstruse to inexperienced students. His theological questions are not trivial, but give light to difficult passages of Scripture."

Hugh made his Abbacy memorable by the erection of the vast Hospitium of St. John, of which a portion, largely rebuilt, is still extant. Even to this day, therefore, Reading is enriched by his foundation.

The original Hospitium probably stood on the site now occupied by Mr. W. C. Blandy's house and the old Town Hall. But with the growth of the town and the increasing *prestige* of the Abbey, the number of pilgrims and travellers applying for hospitality rapidly multiplied, taxing the accommodation of the original building to the utmost. Thus it came about that while persons of a better class received hospitality, the poor were often unable to gain admission.

Hugh refused to tolerate such a condition which was in direct opposition to the Founder's wishes, and determined to rebuild the Hospitium on a much larger scale.

Accordingly he erected outside the gate of the Abbey a splendid building, to which the Church of St. Laurence was attached as an endowment. For this he had previously obtained the permission by charter of King Henry II., as well as the sanction and co-operation of Hubert Walter, the Bishop of Salisbury, who may be regarded as the co-founder of the Hospitium.

The institution consisted of three main divisions: (a) a residence house for the brethren and sisters, connected by a wooden cloister with the Church, and giving them access by a private door to the aisle which led to their chapel in St. John's Chancel; (b) a refectory or guest house of noble dimensions, at least 120 feet long by 20-30 feet broad; (c) the Dormitory running at right angles to the latter and measuring about 200 feet in length.

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So far as is known, the Hospitium of Abbot Hugh underwent no important changes till the reign of Henry VI. in the middle of the fifteenth century (1438), when the nave of St. Laurence's Church was altered, its tower reconstructed, and the hospital rebuilt. From that date the hospital declined, and in 1480 seems to have been entirely suppressed.

Many causes doubtless contributed to the closing of the Hospitium. Other hostgeries had sprung up in the town and supplied accommodation to travellers and pilgrims. Possibly also the jealousy of the Guild Merchant may have discouraged itinerant craftsmen. But whatever the reason for the changes the refectory and the residence house of the Hospitium in 1485 became the home of the Grammar School. The dormitories however continued to be used for the reception of mendicants and wayfarers of the poorer class down to 1539, when the Abbey was dissolved.

Various events of national interest occurred at Reading during Hugh's abbacy.

Thus on August 5th, 1184, Henry II. held a council at Reading, convened for the purpose of electing an Archbishop of Canterbury in the place of Richard, the successor of Thomas à Becket. The council was attended by John, Archbishop of Dublin, the Duke of Saxony, the Suffragan Bishop of the Province, as well as by the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury.

The King did not approve of the nominees of the Prior and Convent of Canterbury, and the council was eventually adjourned to Windsor.

A still more important function took place on March 17th, 1185, when Heraclius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and Lord Roger des Moulins, Master of the Hospitallers of Jerusalem, paid a visit to King Henry II., urging him to undertake a crusade for the rescue of the Holy Land. This historic episode will be described in Chapter VII.

In 1186 Hugh again entertained Henry II., who received the three ambassadors he had recently sent to France

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(Ranulf de Glanvill ; William de Mandevill, Earl of Essex and Albemarle ; Walter, Archbishop of Rouen) to pacify King Philip, who was demanding the wardship of Elianor, the presumed heiress of Bretagne. A truce with King Philip had been secured, but only for about three months, and the King, after consulting with Baldwin, the Archbishop of Canterbury, despatched a fresh embassy in order to extend the truce.

In 1191 Hugh was doubtless closely associated with the exciting events in which John, the Chancellor, William of Longchamp, and Geoffrey, the Archbishop of York, were concerned. On October 5th, a council of bishops and barons was held at the bridge over the Loddon, when it was decided to depose the Chancellor. On the following day at high mass in the great Church at Reading, the whole body of bishops lighted their candles and publicly excommunicated all who had been concerned in Archbishop Geoffrey's arrest.

In 1199 Hugh II. was appointed 17th Abbot of Cluny, where he became Hugh V. or Hugh d'Anjou.³ In his new office he became famous for his piety, his learning and a peculiar graciousness which made him highly popular with both French, English and Spanish.

The golden age of Cluny had passed its meridian when Hugh returned to his old home at Cluny. The spiritual fervour and the zeal for good works of earlier years had cooled down and given place to a love of self-indulgence. There was less faith in St. Benedict's "aspera et dura per quae itur ad Deum."

Hugh at once set himself to remedy this lapse and promulgated a revised set of Statutes, which are still extant. The principal alterations refer to the regular visitation of daughter houses and the grouping of these into provinces. The ancient rules of the Order referring to simony, the society of women, luxury, unnecessary travelling and every form of idleness were again insisted

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on, and Hugh strenuously inculcated the practice of abstinence, of alms, of hospitality, and the orderly conduct at elections and at the various deliberations of the Chapter.

These Statutes were promulgated at the end of October 1200 and at first aroused some opposition; but Pope Innocent III. by a bull dated January 29th, 1205, gave him his full support and confirmation. Hugh took an interest in, and enriched, the famous library at Cluny, and was also the means of relieving the monastery of its debts. Other reforms aimed at strengthening monastic life against the temptations of wealth, evil habits and subservience to temporal authorities.

He died on September 29th, 1207. It must ever be a distinction to Reading Abbey that it supplied one of those men of strong character and high ideals that made Cluny one of the chief centres of religion and civilisation.

iii. Hugh Cook Faringdon

The third Abbot Hugh is the best known of all, for it was his fate to pass along a *via dolorosa* to the gibbet and the quartering-block for refusing to surrender his Abbey to King Henry VIII.

Hugh Cook Faringdon probably derived the name Faringdon from the place of his birth, and belonged to the gentry who so often sent their children to a monastery for their education. At the death of Abbot Thomas Worcester in 1520, Faringdon held the office of sub-chamberlain, from which he was promoted to be Abbot by the suffrages of his brethren, the election being confirmed by the King on September 26th. Soon afterwards the newly installed Abbot received a visit from the King, to whom he gave a "goodly present of great pykes, great carps, salmon, sturgeon and other fish."

Faringdon was a man of strong character, with decided religious convictions and willing to uphold them even at

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the cost of his life. He evidently had some taste for literature and study, since he laments that fate had denied him the advantages of a career at Oxford. Moreover Leonard Cox, the head-master of Reading School, in 1524 dedicates to him a book entitled "The Art or Craft of Rhetorick," as to one "who hath allwayes tenderly favoured the profyte of yonge studentes."

A strict discipline was maintained both at Reading and at the dependent priory of Leominster, and Faringdon took his share in public affairs as was expected of a mitred Abbot. His name figures among the Justices of the Peace for Berkshire.

In 1530 Faringdon joined with other spiritual Lords in petitioning Pope Clement VII. to grant the divorce of Henry VIII. and Catherine of Aragon. Indeed at that time he appears to have been on terms of intimate friendship with the King, who nicknamed him "his own Abbot," and used to exchange New Year gifts. On one occasion when Henry VIII. was hunting in the neighbourhood of Reading, Faringdon sent him presents of fish, probably Kennet trout, and wood-knives.

Some evidence of the Abbot's zeal for the Roman Catholic religion, in its struggle with the new heresies springing up on every side, may be found in a letter written in 1530 to the University of Oxford. There happened at that time to be at the Abbey a monk called Dom John Holyman, who had resigned a Fellowship at New College, Oxford, in order to take the cowl at Reading. Holyman seems to have been a stout adversary of Lutheranism, so much so that Faringdon requests that Holyman, instead of preaching the usual sermon before the University for a doctor's degree, may be allowed to preach in London instead, as that city was infected with Lutheranism, and needed such a popular defender of the faith.

On the question of the royal supremacy, Faringdon appears to have been a good Catholic. It is true that in

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1536 he signed the articles of faith passed by Convocation at the King's desire, which virtually acknowledged the royal supremacy ; but he probably never intended to reject Papal authority in spiritual matters, drawing a distinction, as others did in those days, between the Church of England and the Catholic Church. Indeed a contemporary writer quotes him as having stated that, when sworn to the King's supremacy, he added in his conscience, "of the temporal Church, but not of the spiritual" ; and further "that he would pray for the Pope's holiness as long as he lived, and would once a week say Mass for him, trusting that by such good prayers the Pope should rise again and have the King's highness with all the whole realm in subjection, as he hath had in time past."

In political questions Faringdon loyally supported the King, and at the time of the great Northern insurrection in 1536 was found amongst those contributing men to fight against the rebel forces. The town of Reading itself, on the other hand, appears to have had communications with the rebel leader Robert Aske, for copies of one of his letters and apparently his proclamation were put into circulation. Probably John Eynon, a priest of the Church of St. Giles, Reading, and a special friend of Abbot Faringdon, was also in league with the insurgents. But there is no suggestion of any complicity on the part of the Abbot, who presided at the examination held in December 1536 to investigate the matter.

An unfortunate incident happened in 1537, which may have prejudiced Henry VIII. against Faringdon. The nation was at this time strongly opposed to many of the royal schemes, which gave rise to seething discontent. On the other hand any expression of disapprobation was eagerly watched for by the royal spies, ever ready to construe even idle words into treason. For example, the inadvertent spreading of a rumour that the King was in bad health, or, still worse, that he was dead, was liable to

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be exaggerated into an act of disloyalty. When therefore in December 1537 a report reached Reading that Henry VIII. was dead, and Faringdon wrote to some neighbours to tell them of the report, this act, so natural in itself, was magnified into a grave charge. "For think ye," says a contemporary writer, "that the abbot of Reading deserved any less to be hanged, what time as he wrote letters of the King's death unto divers gentlemen in Berkshire, considering in what a queasy case the realm stood in at that same season? . . . and did enough, if God had not stretched forth his helping hand, to set the realm in as great an uproar as ever it was, and yet the King's majesty, of his royal clemency, forgave him." Pardon however was granted as an act of royal magnanimity, and Faringdon continued in the favour of his King, enjoying all the prestige of a local magnate, of a mitred Abbot, and of a Peer of the Realm.

The story of the martyrdom of Hugh Faringdon forms one of the most dramatic incidents at the dissolution of the Abbey, and will be fully described in Chapter XI. Here we need only say that in those days of crisis Faringdon remained faithful to the Holy See, such loyalty implying a denial of the King's spiritual supremacy and being interpreted as equivalent to treason. Accordingly he was arrested, subjected to a mock trial and condemned to the death of a traitor. Before his own Abbey he was hung on the gibbet, laying down his life "pro Christo et ecclesia," martyred for defending the Church against the Crown.



iv

The Monks of Unwearied Hospitality

“ The monks of the Cluniac Order are at this day a noble pattern of holiness and an example of unwearied and delightful hospitality.”

William of Malmesbury

NO finer eulogy has been pronounced of a monastic community than the words in which William of Malmesbury refers to Reading Abbey soon after its foundation.

The Cluniacs formed a branch of the great Benedictine Order which had been established by St. Benedict in the sixth century and had gradually spread all over Europe. Throughout England especially did it meet with favour ; in many a rich valley, by the side of many a silvery stream, arose a Benedictine monastery, a centre of Christian worship and benevolence. To this famous Order belonged the religious house which Henry Beauclerc built on the banks of the Thames.

Amongst monastic foundations the Abbey of Cluny at that time enjoyed the highest reputation for the zeal with which the Benedictine Rule was observed, special stress being laid on fasting and on silence, as well as on ornate

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ritual at the services of the sanctuary. Its chief work however was a reformed organisation of Benedictine houses, as a result of which Cluny became the head of a large number of dependent monasteries controlled by the one great mother Abbey. At Reading the strict code of the Cluniacs was observed, but the Abbey appears to have been too important to be subjected to the control even of Cluny, so that it retained autonomy in harmony with the historic principles of St. Benedict.¹

Amongst medieval Benedictines there was an unquestioning faith in the saving grace of Christianity. When present at the services of the choir they were in truth worshipping in the "courts of the Lord's house," where the Master Himself was present and ministered to his true disciples. This faith inspired their worship and made it pregnant of noble and spiritual lives.

Seven times a day did the brethren assemble in the choir for divine worship, the names and approximate hours of the services being :²

1. Matins and lauds	..	..	12 (midnight).
2. Prime	..	..	6 a.m.
3. Tierce	..	..	9 a.m.
4. Sext	..	..	12 (noon).
5. Nones	..	..	2-3 p.m.
6. Vespers	..	..	4 p.m. or later.
7. Compline	..	..	7 p.m.

As most of the services were held by daylight, the monks found it convenient to regard the day as co-extensive with the period of daylight. Hence the exact arrangements varied somewhat at different seasons of the year, and the twelve parts or hours into which the monastic day was divided also varied in length, being longer in summer and shorter in winter.

The following is a brief summary of the routine. About midnight, or somewhat later, the monks were awakened

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for matins, an office lasting from one and a half to two hours, and ending with lauds. After this office they went back to the dormitory and slept until daybreak, when they arose for the day, soon afterwards assembling in the choir of the Church for prime.

Prime was followed by the daily chapter, at which confession was made for any breach of discipline, and penance done. Moreover matters of general interest to the community were discussed and arranged. After chapter came the chapter Mass, followed by study or exercise, till the bell summoned to the office of tierce ; this in its turn was succeeded by the principal act of the day, the sacrifice of the Mass. After Mass came the office of sext, followed in due course by nones, and by vespers about sunset. The last office for the day was compline, after which the monks retired to bed.

Next in importance to divine worship came works of hospitality and mercy, and for these there was abundant opportunity in the Hospitium of St. John, in the Leper House and in the Infirmary.

The Hospitium or guest house—an essential part of every monastery—was so placed that the hospitality and almsgiving to pilgrims, beggars and travellers might not interfere with the religious services or routine of the monastery. The exercise of hospitality and charity was enjoined by St. Benedict : “ Let all guests that come be received like Christ Himself, for He will say, ‘ I was a stranger, and ye took Me in.’ ” The Foundation Charter of Reading Abbey emphasises the same precept, and we know from the eulogy quoted above how conscientiously Henry Beauclerc’s wishes were carried out.

The Infirmary was chiefly designed for the care and nursing of any brethren that were sick or had grown infirm through advancing years. There was also a separate room for monks who had been bled or purged, and possibly also a room for the physician, who must be “ cunning in leechery.”

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The story is told of a monk named Richard, who while at matins suddenly became unconscious and lost the use of his limbs. After being nursed in the Infirmary he was cured by a vision of St. Thomas à Becket.⁶

Occasionally other sick folk were received into monastic infirmaries. Medieval romances often allude to wounded knights being carried into neighbouring monasteries to be cared for. The wounded Henry of Essex affords an illustration of this, as will be referred to in Chapter VI.

The Leper House was a third charitable institution, and no higher testimony to the self-denying life of the brethren can be found than is afforded by the tender solicitude shown to the poor outcast leper. Regarded with superstitious horror by the public, excluded from the church services, deserted by their kith and kin, these helpless and scarred victims of a loathsome disease were often allowed to perish in misery and loneliness. Yet they were "Christ's poor" and must be tended with peculiar affection for His sake. Accordingly a special hospital was maintained at Reading where they could be nursed and prayed for until their last breath brought them relief.

William of Canterbury tells a curious story of how a leper-monk of Reading, named Elias, went with his Abbot's approval to Bath in the hope that its sulphur waters might ease his pain. But as he grew no better even after forty days in Bath, Elias set out for Canterbury, doing this secretly, and on the pretence that he was seeking medicine in London. This was done because his "abbot honoured the martyr less than he ought to have done, and might not have countenanced the pilgrimage." On his way to Canterbury Elias met some returning pilgrims, who gave him some of the water of St. Thomas, which after being applied both externally and internally cured his leprosy. Thus the miraculous help of St. Thomas achieved what neither the Bath physicians nor the Bath waters could do.⁷

There were many other occupations which helped to fill

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up the monastic day. The transcription and illumination of books for the library and offices of the Church, the keeping of compotus rolls, the compiling the annals of the establishment formed important duties. Other brethren tended the physic garden, where grew such simples as fennel, borage, costmary, rue, wormwood, sage, betony, pennyroyal, marigold, used for the preparation of salves and infusions. Not only was there a garden of sweet smells and savours, but in the garden grew "virtuous herbs of power to cure their maladies."

Medieval monasteries were to a large extent self-contained centres of industry. The mill, the bakehouse, the brewery, the smithy etc. were all looked after by the brethren, many of whom were taught a handicraft.

Such were some of the occupations of the monastery. Generally speaking the routine was peaceful and uneventful. Little time was left for idleness, the intervals between the services in the choir being largely devoted to charity and industry.

The monks in residence varied in number between fifty and two hundred. They were clothed in woollen under-clothing, and over this wore a loose black tunic, an upper garment called the scapular, and a cowl or capuchin ending in a point. Shoes and stockings completed their outfit. The monastic vow bound them to poverty, chastity and obedience. Religion was taken very seriously in those days, refuge being sought in the cloister as the place where a consistent Christian life, untainted by doubt or worldly dissipation, could best be followed. Even if we do not sympathise with all the motives of a conventional life, we may cherish the memory of good and useful men who, after their light, lived noble lives and experienced the fulfilment of the promise made to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.



v

The Hand of St. James

"So important a relic of so great an Apostle."

Henry Beauclerc

IN medieval days the reputed relics of Apostles and Saints ranked amongst the most coveted possessions of a religious house; they were preserved in reliquaries of great value and beauty, and brought much wealth to the monastic treasury. Many sick persons sought relief from their maladies at the shrines of Saints and returned home made whole by their faith.⁸

The relics of St. Alban, the "noble martyr of Jesus Christ," were visited by numerous British sovereigns, who left costly gifts behind them. St. Thomas's shrine at Canterbury attracted over 200,000 pilgrims a year. At St. Swithin's shrine at Winchester the sick were said to be healed at the rate of three to eighteen a day. The image of the Virgin and the relic of her milk at Walsingham gained a European reputation for the numerous pilgrimages and the immense riches derived from them. King and peasant, foreigner and native, cleric and layman all wended their way to Walsingham.

Reading Abbey was the proud possessor of numerous relics, but the most precious of all was the hand of St. James

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the Greater, which the founder Henry Beauclerc had received from his daughter, the Empress Matilda, and presented to the monastery. In Hoveden's words : " Henry, King of England, in his joy at gaining possession of the hand of St. James the Apostle, founded the noble Abbey of Reading, enriched it with many possessions and placed in it the hand of St. James."

The gift was accompanied by the following letter :

" Henry, King of England and Duke of Normandy, to the Abbot and Convent of Reading, greeting : Know ye that the glorious hand of the blessed James the Apostle which the Empress Matilda, my daughter, gave me on her return from Germany, I, at her request, send to you and grant for ever to the Church of Reading. I command you, therefore, to receive it with all veneration and that you and your successors take care to show it in the Church of Reading all possible honour and reverence, as is due to so important a relic of so great an Apostle."

This highly prized relic was in the first instance enclosed in a gold case, which was removed by Richard I. In order to compensate the Abbey for this loss, King John made a grant of a mark of gold to be paid annually at the Exchequer, and this sum Henry III. afterwards commuted to ten marks of silver.

Subsequently the relic may have been preserved in a valuable golden casket, of which the Abbey was very proud. This casket was in the form of a little shrine, and garnished with sapphires, oriental pearls, rubies and other rare stones (camahut, balamitibus). Its weight was 20 lb. 9 oz. 7 dwt., and its value about two hundred pounds, equivalent to a far higher sum to-day.

This casket was probably preserved in a chapel behind the high altar, where processions of pilgrims could pay their devotions as they passed along the semi-circular corridor surrounding the chancel.

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Few saints enjoyed a greater popularity than St. James the Greater. The Cathedral of Compostella, where his body was believed to rest, attracted devotees from every corner of Christendom. Whole fleets crowded with English pilgrims plied regularly from Dover, Dartmouth, Bristol and other ports, each ship carrying from thirty to a hundred passengers. An English traveller in the fourteenth century relates that he saw lying in the harbour of Corunna, the port for Compostella, eighty shiploads of pilgrims, of which thirty came from England.

Reading Abbey, with its famous relic of St. James, shared in the great popularity accorded to that saint. He was one of the two Apostles to whom with the Virgin Mary the Abbey was dedicated. It was in his honour that was granted the shield of arms bearing the blazon azure three escallops or, those shells being frequently worn by pilgrims to Compostella. Again one of the most important fairs at the Abbey was, in virtue of a grant of Henry II., held annually on St. James's day and the three following days. The richly engraved Abbey seal of 1328 bears a figure of St. James in addition to those of the Virgin and St. John, and is inscribed: "The common seal of the conventional Church of Reading, founded in honour of St. Mary and of the Apostles John and James." Evidently the association with the pilgrim saint was highly esteemed.

The visit to Compostella must have involved serious hardships, even for pilgrims in robust health. The small size of the sailing boats, the risk of storms, the horrors of sea-sickness, the arrival at Corunna amongst foreigners, the overland journey to Compostella, might well daunt even an ardent devotee. Many such therefore were content with the less fatiguing visit to the relic at Reading, where the lavish hospitality of the monks, the splendour of the Church, the dazzling shrine, the tomb and the monument of the royal founder and the promise of Indulgences formed powerful attractions.

The Hand of St. James

Although the shrine at Reading could not rival Canterbury or Walsingham in popularity, there is abundant evidence that it was known far and wide as a resort of pilgrims. That evidence consists in the establishment of a fair, as already mentioned, and in the awarding of Indulgences to pilgrims.

Thus Hilary, Bishop of Chichester (1147-69), with the assent of Jocelin, diocesan Bishop (of Salisbury), granted an Indulgence for fifteen days to all who visited the relics of St. James the Apostle at the Abbey, on his festival, July 25th, or within the octave of the same. Other bishops and archbishops granted similar Indulgences, especially to pilgrims who bestowed donations.

The pathetic cry “Sancte Jacobe, ora pro me,” would echo through the choir much as similar petitions may be heard at Lourdes and at other modern shrines. In those days of faith in relics there seemed no better way of spending time and money than in kneeling at a sacred shrine and in obtaining remission of the punishment which often remains after the guilt of sin has been forgiven. We may be sure that many a sick and penitent pilgrim returned home healed both in body and mind. “Not in vain he wore his sandal-shoon and scallop-shell.”

This famous relic is referred to in the report made to Thomas Cromwell by Dr. John London, one of the visitors appointed to report on the monasteries. Writing on September 18th, 1538, London says: “I have requyred of my lord Abbott the relykes of hys howse, wiche he schewyd unto me with gudde will. I have taken an inventory of them and have lokkyd them upp behynde ther high awlter, and have the key in my keping, and they be always redy at your lordeships commaundement.” “Saynt James hande” is specially mentioned amongst “the relyques off the Howsse off Redyng.”

The shrine of St. James was demolished at the time when a wholesale desecration of the Abbey took place in the

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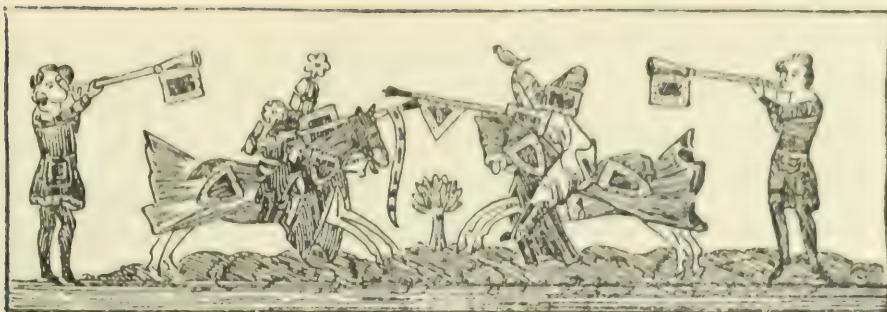
sixteenth century. Such revered treasures associated with the memory of a Saint or Apostle seemed to excite the special hatred of an iconoclastic age. All reverence for the symbols of holy things vanished from the land. The more costly the shrine which a beautiful piety had provided, the greater the cupidity aroused.

In October 1786 some workmen, while making excavations at the eastern end of the Abbey, discovered in the church wall a left human hand, which is now preserved in the sacristy of St. Peter's, Marlow-on-Thames. All the phalanges remain *in situ*, the enveloping skin being black and shrivelled; the metacarpal bones and the tendons at the back of the hand are absent. Two or three of the carpal bones remain and the tendons in the palms are perfect, as if the hand had been torn off just above the wrist. The thumb is bent a little inwards, and the fingers are bent towards the palm. The hand as a whole is small and slender.

There has been much discussion as to the genuineness and antiquity of this hand. Father John Morris regarded it as the undoubted relic of St. James, and speaks of the "precious treasure that has survived the destruction of the Abbey built to receive it." The evidence of identification however is unsatisfactory.



fig. v.—The Trial by Combat of Henry of Esser and Robert of Montfort.



vi

A Trial by Combat

“ Thrice is he arm’d that hath his quarrel just ;
And he but naked, though lock’d up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.”

Shakespeare

THE Trial by Combat of Henry of Essex and Robert of Montfort, which Jocelin of Brakelond has recorded in his “ Chronicle,” and which Carlyle has immortalised in “ Past and Present,” forms a notable incident in the annals of the Abbey and illustrates an extraordinary development in the administration of justice during the Middle Ages (Fig. v.). *

i. The Combatants

Two combatants form the *dramatis personae* of this *cause célèbre*—Henry of Essex and Robert of Montfort.¹⁰

Henry of Essex was a man “ held in high esteem amongst the great men of the realm, a man of much account, of

* Fig. v. represents the “ Trial by Combat of Henry of Essex and Robert of Montfort,” and is reproduced from a painting by Mr. Harry Morley.

Within the lists are seen the two combatants. Henry of Essex, wounded and defeated, has fallen to the ground, while facing him stands the victorious Robert of Montfort.

In the sky above is seen St. Edmund with starved Gilbert de Cereville by his side. On the dais is seated King Henry II. with Roger, Abbot of Reading, on his right.

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noble birth, conspicuous by deeds of arms, the King's standard-bearer, and feared by all on account of his power." In 1154 he was appointed to the office of royal constable or *constabularius regis*, a position of great dignity in the time of Henry I. and his successors; the constable was practically a quartermaster-general of the court and of the army, and usually found with the garrison in the castle or with the army in the field. Essex, as already mentioned, also carried the royal standard in war-time—a post apparently associated with that of royal constable.

When King Henry undertook his expedition into North Wales in 1157, Essex accompanied him, and it was during this expedition that took place the notorious incident at the Battle of Coleshille, so pregnant with his future destiny. We shall recur to the details of this incident.

In the following year he again accompanied his sovereign to France and rendered valuable services during the quarrels with the King of France, especially in connection with the expedition against the city of Toulouse.

Unhappily the proud royal constable had a dark side to his nature, which Carlyle has described in his inimitable style :

" Henry Earl of Essex, Standard-bearer of England, had high places and emoluments; had a haughty high soul, yet with various flaws, or rather with one many-branched flaw and crack, running through the texture of it. For example, did he not treat Gilbert de Cereville in the most shocking manner? He cast Gilbert into prison; and, with chains and slow torments, wore the life out of him there. And Gilbert's crime was understood to be only that of innocent Joseph: the Lady Essex was a Potiphar's Wife, and had accused poor Gilbert! Other cracks, and branches of that widespread flaw in the Standard-bearer's soul we could point out: but indeed the main stem and trunk of all is too visible in this, That

A Trial by Combat

he had no right reverence for the Heavenly in Man,—that far from showing due reverence to St. Edmund, he did not even show him common justice. While others in the Eastern Counties were adorning and enlarging with rich gifts St. Edmund's resting-place, which had become a city of refuge for many things, this Earl of Essex flatly defrauded him, by violence or quirk of law, of five shillings yearly, and converted said sum to his own poor uses ! Nay, in another case of litigation, the unjust Standard-bearer, for his own profit, asserting that the cause belonged not to St. Edmund's Court, but to *his* in Lailand Hundred, 'involved us in travellings and innumerable expenses, vexing the servants of St. Edmund for a long tract of time.' In short, he is without reverence for the Heavenly, this Standard-bearer ; reveres only the Earthly, Gold-coined ; and has a most morbid lamentable flaw in the texture of him. It cannot come to good." ¹¹

Less is known about the second combatant, Robert of Montfort, who was a kinsman of Henry of Essex and his equal in birth and power. He was descended from the Hugh of Montfort who accompanied William the Conqueror over from Normandy and was present at the Battle of Hastings.

Robert of Montfort's sister Adeline became the wife of Robert of Vere, who thus became possessed of the office of constable. This same office of constable was subsequently held by Henry of Essex, and it is possible that the accusation of treason was partly due to a grudge on the part of the descendant of the dispossessed line against the existing possessor of the fief.

ii. The Battle of Coleshille

The quarrel between Henry of Essex and Robert of Montfort originated in an incident which occurred during

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Henry II.'s first Welsh war, i.e. A.D. 1157. The English King had for some years been seeking an excuse for interfering in Welsh affairs and eventually found his opportunity in the domestic quarrels of the Welsh princes. Owen Gwyneth, prince of North Wales, had confiscated the estates of his brother Cadwallader and banished him from the country. Thereupon Cadwallader took refuge at the English Court and implored Henry's assistance in the recovery of his lands. Apart from such persuasion Henry was tempted into war both by a desire for glory and by the hope of recovering territories which had formerly been tributary to England.

Accordingly a Council was held at Northampton in July, at which orders were issued for an expedition into North Wales, which was attacked both by land and sea. The English forces assembled near Chester, on Saltney Marsh, and were joined by Madoc Ap Meredith, prince of Powys, while the Welsh forces under Gwyneth with his three sons were entrenched at Basingwerk. The King, with his youthful daring, set off at once by way of the sea coast, hoping to surprise the Welsh. But Owen's sons were on the watch and suddenly attacked the foe in the narrow passage of Coleshille, where they had secretly hidden a powerful ambuscade. The English, entangled in the woody, marshy ground, were easily routed by the nimble, light-armed Welsh. Suddenly a cry was heard "The King is slain," as a result of which Henry of Essex, the hereditary Standard-bearer of England, dropped the Royal Standard and fled in terror. King Henry however soon proved that he was still alive, rallied his troops and cut his way through the ambush with such vigour that Owen judged it prudent to withdraw from Basingwerk, and seek a safer retreat amongst the hills round Snowdon.

Soon after this peace was concluded. Owen reinstated his banished brother, did homage to King Henry, and gave hostages for his future loyalty. As the South Wales princes

A Trial by Combat

were all vassals of North Wales, Owen's submission was equivalent to a formal acknowledgment of Henry's rights as lord paramount over the whole country, and the King was technically justified in boasting that he had brought the whole of Wales under his jurisdiction.

Essex appears to have been acquitted by his Sovereign of dishonourable conduct, since he was intrusted with an important command in the subsequent expedition against Toulouse.

iii. Ordeals

By the “ordeal” or *Dei judicium* was meant in the Middle Ages a miraculous decision as to the justice or otherwise of an accusation or a claim, and such ordeals, in which the solemn rites of religion were associated with the public administration of justice, were generally accepted as conclusive evidence of guilt or innocence.

In a people just emerging from ignorance and barbarism, the rules of evidence as accepted in modern times were too complex to be appreciated, even if the justices possessed the necessary power of discrimination and execution. Some shorter and simpler process was required ; especially was some sign that appealed to the senses likely to carry conviction. Still better if such sign indicated in the popular imagination the interference of the Almighty. What better evidence indeed could be desired as to the truth or otherwise of an accusation ? How could an omniscient Deity, without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls to the ground, remain indifferent if solemnly invoked by his own priests and worshippers ?

Thus in course of time such ordeals became recognised by the legislature and regulated with minute exactitude. The accuser first of all swore to the truth of the charge, while the accused attested his innocence by oath. Then followed the necessary preparations for the ordeal, these

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including fasting, prayer and the administration of the Holy Communion with the words " May this body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ prove thee innocent or guilty this day."

There were various forms of ordeal. We are here however only concerned with one form, viz. the judicial duel or trial by combat.

iv. The Trial by Combat

Not far from the River Gate of the Abbey is situate an eyot bathed by the silvery Thames, as it flows amongst green pastures dotted with sheep and cattle, and sparkling with cowslips, kingcups and buttercups. To the north and the south rise gentle hills enclosing the Thames valley and formerly fringed with forests stretching for many miles up and down the river.

The charge of treason which Robert of Montfort brought against Henry of Essex referred to the incident during the battle of Coleshill, which has already been described. King Henry took no notice of the alleged act of treachery at the time, apparently attributing it to sudden terror and not to wilful or criminal misconduct. But so odious an accusation, involving a capital crime, proved too serious to be permanently overlooked, and as each party accused the other, King Henry decreed that the truth must be elucidated by a trial by combat, which was appointed to take place on April 8th at Reading, to which town the King proceeded, accompanied by the great nobles of the realm. Our authority for the duel is the story told by Essex himself in the Abbey of Reading to Abbot Samson of St. Edmundsbury, who doubtless rejoiced in such a tribute to the glorious King and martyr Edmund. Carlyle retells the tale in a stirring passage and shows how the unjust standard-bearer becomes a lamed soul which cannot fight.

" And it came to pass, while Robert de Montfort

A Trial by Combat

thundered on him manfully with hard and frequent strokes, and a valiant beginning promised the fruit of victory, Henry of Essex, rather giving way, glanced round on all sides ; and lo, at the rim of the horizon, on the confines of the River and land, he discerned the glorious King and Martyr Edmund, in shining armour, and as if hovering in the air ; looking towards him with severe countenance, nodding his head with a mien and motion of austere anger. At St. Edmund's hand there stood also another Knight, Gilbert de Cereville, whose armour was not so splendid, whose stature was less gigantic ; casting vengeful looks at him. This he seeing with his eyes, remembered that old crime brings new shame. And now wholly desperate, and changing reason into violence, he took the part of one blindly attacking, not skilfully defending. Who while he struck fiercely was more fiercely struck ; and so, in short, fell down vanquished, and it was thought slain. As he lay there for dead, his kinsmen, Magnates of England, besought the King, that the Monks of Reading might have leave to bury him."

Under the care of the monks he recovered and eventually joined that famous community of brethren.

As a result of his defeat Henry of Essex was outlawed and his great fief was added to the Crown demesne.

It was a strange fate that converted the famous royal constable, the hereditary standard-bearer of England, into one of the brethren of Reading Abbey ! The gleaming helmet, hauberk, lance and shield were exchanged for the black Benedictine robe and cowl, the military pomp and excitement of tournaments and court life for the peaceful, contemplative life of a monk, the blare of the trumpet for the chants of the choir, the service of the king for the service of the King of kings.

Doubtless it was true of his new life as of the old that

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“ the life of man on the earth is a warfare.” But the new warfare was against the world, the flesh and the devil, to be fought with spiritual weapons. What memories of his past life must have crowded upon him as he joined in the services of the Church, ministered to the lepers in their lazar-house or entertained the pilgrims in the noble Hospitium of St. John. The lesson however seems to have been well learned, since “ he wiped out the blot upon his previous life under the regular life, and in his endeavours to cleanse the long week of his dissolute life by at least one purifying sabbath so cultivated the studies of his virtues as to bring forth the fruit of happiness.”

Fig. vi.—The Visit of Heraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem.





vii

The Visit of Heraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem

“Heraclius, homo vitae sanctitate non infimus.”

Bosham, *Vita S. Thomae Cantuar.*

THE year 1185 witnessed a notable incident at Reading Abbey, when Heraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, paid a visit to King Henry II., imploring him to save Jerusalem from capture by Saladin. Had Heraclius been successful in his quest the history of Palestine might have been profoundly modified.

The interview between the King and the Patriarch took place in the Chapter House, which has been the scene of so many historic councils (Fig. vi.).* A brief *résumé* of the tragic events in Palestine will explain the urgent necessity that brought the Patriarch to Reading.

The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, over which Baldwin V. then reigned, was in dire peril of capture by the Sultan Saladin, who after a series of victories had finally brought Egypt and Northern Syria under a single rule. One appeal after another for help had been sent to the Western powers,

* Fig. vi., entitled “The Visit of Heraclius to King Henry II.,” is reproduced from a picture by Mr. Stephen Reid. At the east end of the Chapter House is seated King Henry II. with Abbot Hugh II. on his right. Before the King kneels Heraclius in the act of urging his petition, and next him stands the Master of the Hospitallers, wearing the well-known costume, and grasping the banner of Jerusalem.

On the steps leading up to the dais are seen the keys of Jerusalem and of the Holy Sepulchre, together with other gifts brought by Heraclius.

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but in vain. As a last resource Baldwin decided to dispatch a special embassy to France and England ; this embassy was to offer the crown of Jerusalem in turn to Philip Augustus and to Henry II. in the hope of tempting them to undertake a crusade and succour the Holy Land. Henry II. indeed, as an Angevin, was the natural heir of the kingdom of Jerusalem on the extinction of the line descended from Fulk of Anjou.

The embassy consisted of Heraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, accompanied by Arnold de Toroge, Master of the Temple, and Roger des Moulins, Master of the Hospitallers.

After landing at Brindisi, the embassy proceeded *via* Rome to Verona (here unhappily Toroge died), where they were welcomed by Pope Lucius III. with his Cardinals, and by the Emperor Frederick I., with numerous spiritual and temporal peers, and where, on November 4th, 1184, Archbishop Gerhard of Ravenna delivered an inspiring sermon, emphasising the paramount claims of the Holy Land.

On January 16th, 1185, the Patriarch reached Paris, where he was hailed as "an angel from heaven," and where he preached a crusade to the assembled multitude. By January 29th, 1185, he had landed in England and made a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Thomas at Canterbury.

Meanwhile King Henry II., hearing of the approach of Heraclius, came south to Reading, and, on March 18th, 1185, gave audience to the embassy in the Chapter House of its famous Abbey.

Bearing a letter from the Pope, Heraclius prostrated himself before the King and in a flood of tears addressed to him this petition :

" My lord King, our Lord Jesus Christ calls you, and the cry of God's people invites you to come to the defence of Jerusalem. Here are the keys of the Kingdom, which the king and nobles of the land have sent you by my hands. You are the only one on whom, after God, they

The Visit of Heraclius

rely, and from whom they hope for salvation. Come then, great lord, without delay, and rescue us from the hand of our enemies and from those who persecute us. Saladin, the prince of the enemies of the Cross of Christ, and the whole heathen horde in the most shameless manner are attacking and invading the land of Jerusalem (which may God prevent !)."

With these words Heraclius handed to King Henry the keys of the tower of David and of the Holy Sepulchre, together with the banner of the kingdom of Jerusalem, as gifts from Baldwin and his nobles.

At the conclusion of this address, the King seized the hand of the Patriarch and raised him up, saying : " May our Lord Jesus Christ, the Mighty King, be the defender of His people, and avert His anger and His indignation, and we shall, with His help, be His fellow-workers as far as we are able, to whom be honour and glory."

Before giving his decision, Henry decided to consult his Council, which was summoned to assemble in London. After prolonged discussion the Patriarch was informed that the King, though deeply sympathising with the grievous fate of the Holy Land, found many difficulties in undertaking a crusade. Moreover, he had already made great sacrifices for the Holy Land, and was ready to give further financial help. The Patriarch replied that the Holy Land needed not only money but men, and, as the King persisted in his decision, made an urgent appeal to the whole assembly. As a result, the State Justiciar, Ralf of Glanville, the Archbishops Baldwin of Canterbury and Walter of Rouen, Bishop Hugo of Durham and many knights from England, Normandy, Brittany, Aquitania, Anjou, Le Mans and Touraine took the cross.

Heraclius however was bitterly disappointed with Henry's refusal, and soon afterwards returned to Jerusalem, which was eventually captured by Saladin.



viii

“Sumer is icumen in”

“The most remarkable ancient musical composition in existence.”

E. Naumann

IN the British Museum is treasured a MS. (Harl. 978) which contains a Canon or Rota “Sumer is icumen in,” which was written down by a monk in the Calendar of the Abbey about the year 1240. This Canon is the oldest piece of polyphonic and canonical music in existence, and has thus been preserved for our perpetual inspiration and delight (Fig. vii.).* Doubtless it will form the most enduring memorial of the ancient Abbey, more enduring even than the surviving ivy-mantled ruins.¹²

i. The Canon

“Sumer is icumen in” is one of the earliest examples of English secular music. Its harmony is far in advance of that of any contemporary composition, and reflects glory on the English school of music in the thirteenth century.

The Canon forms a part-song for six voices. The four upper voices have a melody consisting of two independent stanzas, which is begun by the leader and taken up by

* Fig. vii., entitled “Sumer is icumen in,” is reproduced from the picture by Mr. E. Board, and represents a Benedictine monk transcribing the famous canon. The monk is seen pausing for a moment to look out into the sunny cloister and to watch a cuckoo that is flying across the garth. In the monk’s left hand is the half-finished MS., while near by is a regal or portable organ.



Fig. vii.—“Sumer is icumen in.”

“Sumer is icumen in”

three other singers in turn, each entering at his appointed interval, i.e. four bars later, and on the same note. The music for the lower voices constitutes a true rondel, there being two melodies which begin together and are interchanged after eight bars. The freedom from contrapuntal errors is remarkable.

Of the two sets of words one is in English, the other in Latin. The English words have been pronounced by J. Wright to be “thirteenth century Wessex, Berkshire or Wiltshire,” and are admirably adapted to the simple pastoral melody, with its merry graceful swing. Indeed they form one of the sweetest lyrics in early English poetry, when songs of spring and summer, of birds and flowers were so popular. The note of “the merry cuckowe, messenger of spring,” was frequently imitated in our national folk-songs, and this Canon has been well termed the “cuckoo-song.”

The English song in modernised words is as follows :

Sumer is come in,
Loud sing, Cuckoo !
Groweth seed, and bloweth mead,
And spring'th the wood now,
Sing, Cuckoo.

Ewe bleateth after lamb,
Loweth after calf (the) cow ;
Bullock starteth, buck verteth,
Merry sing, Cuckoo,
Cuckoo, Cuckoo !
Well sing'st thou, Cuckoo,
Nor cease thou never now.

The alternative Latin words, a hymn to the Saviour, form a motet, and fit the music badly. It seems as if a folk-song had been adapted for the religious service of the choir, or as if the Latin hymn had been added to lend an odour of sanctity to the introduction of a popular melody into the cloister.

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The Latin hymn is as follows :

Perspice Christicola,
Que dignacio !
Celicus agricola
Pro vitis vicio,
Filio

Non parcens, exposuit
Mortis exicio ;
Qui captivos semivivos
A suppicio
Vite donat,
et secum coronat
in celi solio.

The melody has the compass of a ninth and is in the first mode of rhythm : that is, long and breve notes alternate with each other. The rhythm of the *pes* is in the fifth mode, the notes being all longs with the exception of the binary and ternary ligatures. In each case the long pause, the *pausa debita*, of both modes is used.

The Canon does not follow any of the old ecclesiastical modes, but is written in the modern key of F major, every diatonic interval of that scale being used. It also supplies the first example of a basso ostinato or ground-bass.

The conformity with many of the rules of modern music, in which the closes are composed of a leading-note rising to its proper resolution, is very remarkable, and indicates an advanced knowledge of musical composition in the thirteenth century.

History does not tell us who composed this the earliest specimen of secular polyphonic music known to exist, or when or where the composer lived. The Wessex dialect of the words seems to suggest a familiarity with Berkshire or Wiltshire, possibly even with Reading itself ; but many years may have separated the composer from the monk who actually wrote down the Canon.

Both words and melody bear the characters of a folk-

“Sumer is icumen in”

song which was possibly handed on from minstrel to minstrel. In fact, it is probable that there existed in England from early times a national secular song with a perfect diatonic scale, and a melody differing entirely from church music. But no contemporary polyphonic composition can for a moment compare with the Canon, whose composer ranks with the great musicians of the world.

ii. The Transcriber

“The monk at Reading deserves an imperishable crown of glory.” In these words does Riemann, the learned historian of music, recognise the splendid service rendered by the monk to whom we owe the Canon.

The English Benedictines were passionately devoted to music, and appreciated its power to charm their cares away. They devoted much time to this art. Hence the great proficiency in music that was attained in the song-schools which the Abbeys maintained for the services of the minster. But such church music still retained barbarous combinations of sound and gross violations of musical grammar, and could not compare with the contemporary secular music either as regards melody or harmony.

We know however that minstrels with their folk-songs not infrequently gained access to religious houses in order to relieve the monotony of the monastic life, and it seems certain that in the early thirteenth century there was amongst the brethren at Reading a scholarly discantor, who wrote down a beautiful melody with a well-ordered succession of tones and semi-tones, far in advance of any contemporary composition that has survived. “The wit of musice wel he knew,” and that “wit” has enriched the world with this musical treasure.

Various authorities have stated that the transcriber was John of Fornsete, keeper of the Cartulary of Reading Abbey. This statement however is without justification,

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and is merely based on the fact that a prayer for John of Fornsete occurs in the margin of the Reading calendar, which the transcriber has written later in the volume. The entry is written in the calendar, against St. Wulstan's day, 1239: "Ora, Wulstane, pro nostro fratre, Johanne de Fornsete." John of Fornsete should certainly not be described as the transcriber of the rota.

There has been much discussion as to the date of the MS. Now however a general consensus has fixed the date at or about 1240, this view being supported by the evidence of palæography, history and notation.

Most of the MSS. preserved in the library at Reading Abbey perished at the dissolution of the monasteries. A few however have survived, and in the British Museum, the Bodleian and elsewhere, are treasured some fine illuminated volumes, embellished with fanciful paintings and miniatures in gold, blue, green, red and other colours. At these artistic productions various skilled craftsmen, calligraphers, rubricators, illuminators, miniaturists and binders worked jointly, each contributing the special work in which he excelled. Although from a decorative point of view the MS. containing "Sumer is icumen in" takes a humble place, in historical importance it is *facile princeps*.

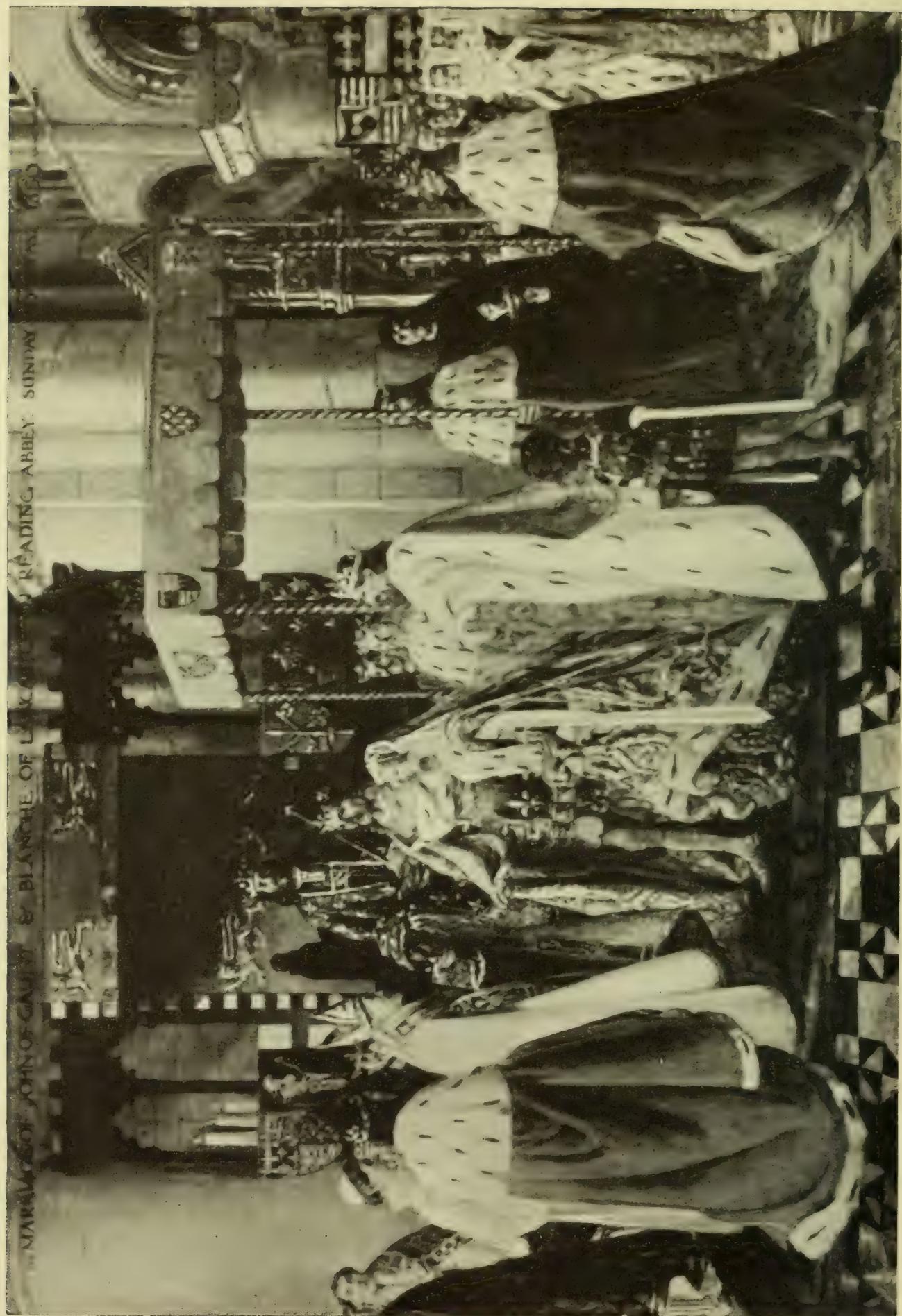


Fig. viii.—The marriage of John of Gaunt.



ix

The Marriage of John of Gaunt

"A wonder wel-faringe knight . . . of good mochel."

Chaucer

THE Abbey has been the scene of many political and religious ceremonies which are enrolled on the pages of our national annals. Perhaps the most important amongst these ceremonies, as regards its influence on our national destiny, was the marriage between John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster, which was celebrated on Sunday, May 19th, 1359. From the issue of this marriage sprang three Kings for the British throne—Henry IV., Henry V. and Henry VI.—as well as numerous Kings of Portugal (Fig. viii.).*

* Fig. viii. In this scene, reproduced from a painting by the late Mr. E. Boardman Wright, the wedding of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster is depicted at the moment when the bridal pair are advancing towards the officiating Bishop of Salisbury.

On the adjacent throne is seated King Edward III., the father of the bridegroom, and near to him is seen Edward the Black Prince. Behind John of Gaunt is his younger brother Edmund of Langley. In front of the high altar stands Abbot Appleford, and near to him the Earl Marshal.

The canopy is supported by four peers, of whom the one nearest to Blanche is her father, Henry, Duke of Lancaster. Close by stands Chaucer, bearing a scroll.

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i. John of Gaunt

John of Gaunt, fourth son of King Edward III., was nineteen years old when he led to the altar his fair cousin Blanche, the second daughter of Henry, Duke of Lancaster, the greatest feudatory of the Crown. The bridegroom was a tall and soldier-like man with a determined yet thoughtful countenance. Chaucer speaks of him as "a wonder wel-faringe knight . . . of good mochel" (a wonderfully handsome knight of great stature).

Even in the courtship of princes love does not always run smooth; and John of Gaunt's early attempts at wooing had met with disappointment. At last however his perseverance was rewarded and the maiden relented. In due course a papal dispensation to the wedding was obtained from Innocent the Sixth, since bridegroom and bride were within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity, and the bride was won.

Through this marriage John of Gaunt, on the death of his father-in-law, Henry of Lancaster, succeeded to the earldom of Lancaster and to half of the extensive Lancastrian estates. On the subsequent death of Maud, Blanche's elder sister, he succeeded to the remainder of Lancaster's possessions, and thus became the most wealthy and influential peer of the realm. He now assumed the titles of Earl of Derby, Lincoln and Leicester, and shortly afterwards the King created him Duke of Lancaster "by girding him with the Sword, a Capp of Furr on his Head, with a Circlet of Gold and Pearls."

Not only did this wedding enhance the prestige of the new Duke of Lancaster, but it proved of dynastic importance, since, as already mentioned, this marriage supplied several Kings to the British throne and to the Portuguese throne.

ii. Blanche of Lancaster

Blanche of Lancaster was a beautiful English blonde with golden hair, tall and graceful. These personal charms

The Marriage of John of Gaunt

were enhanced by unusual graces of disposition and a "goodly soft speche." There was also a taste for literature and Chaucer found in the bride his earliest patroness.

Blanche is best known to us from Chaucer's eulogy in "The Book of the Duchesse : "

" As the someres sonne bright
Is fairer, clerer, and hath more light
Than any planete, in heven,
The mone, or the sterres seven,
For al the worlde, so had she
Surmounted hem alle of beaute,
Of maner and of comlinesse,
Of stature and wel set gladnesse,
Of goodlihede so wel beseye (endowed)."

Blanche was a year younger than John of Gaunt, and proved a devoted helpmate during the ten years of her married life. She bore her husband five children, of whom one was crowned Henry IV. of England and another wedded the future King of Portugal.

Her life however was cut short by an outbreak of the great plague, and on September 12th, 1369, she fell a victim to the disease that had already proved fatal to her father and sister.

The death of his dearly loved wife was a grievous blow to the Duke, who for a time seems to have lost all interest in life.

" I have of sorwe so gret woon,
That Ioye gete I never noon,
Now that I see my lady bright,
Which I have loved with al my might,
Is fro me deed, and is a-goon.

Allas, [o] deeth ! what ayleth thee,
That thou noldest have taken me,
Whan that thou toke my lady swete ?
That was so fayr, so fresh, so free,
So good, that men may wel [y]-see
Of al goodnesse she had no mete ! "

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She was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral, where eventually John of Gaunt, in spite of subsequent marriages, chose to be buried by her side. A noble monument was erected to their memory by their son, Henry IV., on the north side of the high altar. "Their Portraitures were cut in alabaster, in full length, their hands erect in prayer; the Duke in armour, and his Duchess in the habit of the times." "

iii. The Wedding Ceremony

The Abbey Church was a worthy scene for a royal marriage.

The ceremony was performed by Robert Wyvil, the Lord Bishop of Sarum, in whose diocese Reading was then situated. Amongst the guests were King Edward III., three of the bridegroom's brothers, Edward the Black Prince, Lionel and Edmund, together with many great nobles and ladies of the realm. It is possible that Chaucer, the King's "well-beloved yeoman," was also present.

The Sarum rite, then in use, differs but little from the Roman rite now used in England. We can therefore picture to ourselves John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster standing before the high altar, while the Bishop of Salisbury puts the solemn question: "John of Gaunt, wilt thou take Blanche of Lancaster here present for thy lawful wedded wife according to rite of Holy Mother the Church?" Then would come in strong decisive words: "I will." To Blanche is put the question: "Wilt thou take John of Gaunt here present for thy lawful wedded husband?" The response: "I will"—in sweet timorous tones, would probably scarcely be heard amidst the great throng, and under the large sweep of the Norman arches.

The bride is then given away by her father, after which the bridegroom, taking her left hand in his right, says: "I, John of Gaunt, take thee, Blanche of Lancaster, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward,

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for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part, if Holy Church will it permit, and thereto I plight thee my troth." Similarly the bride takes the left hand of the bridegroom and repeats the same words with change of persons. While the hands are joined, the celebrant Bishop throws his stole over the contracting parties, as though to tie the knot. Kneeling down, they are now sprinkled with holy water while the Bishop says: "Ego vos conjungo in matrimonium, in nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti."

Then follows the nuptial Mass, at which both parties communicate and receive the solemn nuptial blessing. Probably at the end of the Mass the Bishop might speak a few appropriate words emphasising the dignity of the sacrament of matrimony, and the duties of husband and wife to one another.

During many a long year would the remembrance of this historic ceremony be cherished by the privileged spectators. This union in holy matrimony of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster was destined to leave deep footprints on the sands of time.

iv. The Joustings

In medieval days the marriage of persons of rank was celebrated by jousts and tournaments, and to add lustre to so memorable an occasion as this marriage a magnificent tournament lasting several days was proclaimed, to be held first at Reading and afterwards at London. The nobles of the land entered the lists in glittering armour and on gaily caparisoned steeds, and strove to excel in deeds of valour. Meanwhile the ladies of the Court, in sumptuous attire, encouraged their favourite knights and bestowed prizes on the victors.

The festivities began at Reading with a three days' jousting, the King's Meadow, which adjoins the Abbey

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precincts and overlooks the Thames, being probably chosen as the tilting-ground. After three days the tournament was adjourned to London for a similar period.

In order to mark its loyalty to the Sovereign and his family, the City of London proclaimed a tournament at which John Luffin, Mayor, John Barnes and John Bury, Sheriffs, and twenty-one Aldermen undertook to hold the field for three days against all comers. At the appointed time and in the presence of King John of France and King David II. of Scotland, then prisoners in England, twenty-four knights, wearing the cognisance of the City both on their shields and surcoats, rode into the lists and made good their challenges.

When the tournament was over the people were astonished and delighted to discover that the twenty-four knights consisted of the King, with Edward the Black Prince, Lionel, John and Edmund, and nineteen great Barons, who had privily taken the place of the Mayor, Sheriffs and Aldermen. The King represented the Mayor, the Black Prince the senior Sheriff John Barnes, Prince Lionel the other Sheriff John Bury, while the Barons replaced the Aldermen. In fact the whole Corporation of London was personated by the royal family and nobility of England.

Thus was brought to a close this historic tournament which was celebrated with all the pomp and pageantry for which the reign of Edward III. was famous.



¶

The Struggle with the Guild Merchant

"I have endowed the monastery with Reading . . . with its woods, fields, pastures, meadows and rivers, with its mills and fisheries, with its churches, chapels, cemeteries, oblations and tithes, and with a mint and moneyer at Reading."

The Foundation Charter

READING may be regarded as a typical example of a town that grew up around an Abbey, and whose civic and commercial development was thereby rendered slow and precarious. In fact a bitter quarrel raged for two hundred and fifty years between the burghers as represented by their Guild Merchant and the monastery governed by "my Lord of Reading," and the story is of singular interest as illustrating the gradual emancipation of a community from serfage to partial independence. On one side were arrayed wealth, prestige, learning, authority; on the other the eternal birthright of freedom and justice, and nascent aspirations for self-government. A brief historical retrospect will explain the origin of the strife.

At the time of the Conquest Reading was a small burgh of about thirty homesteads, and belonged directly to the Crown; it was in fact a King's Manor, "a villa regia," and formed part of the national property.¹⁴ In the words

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of Domesday "The King holds Reading in demesne," and this relationship conferred on the burghers concerned special privileges as well as exemption from certain public burdens. When however in 1121 King Henry I. founded his Abbey and annexed Reading to it, the burgh was dethroned from its favoured position, and henceforward owed fealty to the monastery instead of to the Crown.

For many a year the burgh lay absolutely at the mercy of the Abbot. He owned its soil, its streams, its fisheries, its mills. He controlled the market and the trade, and supervised the cloth manufacture. He appointed the warden of the Guild (afterwards the mayor) as well as its inferior officers. Every guildsman or gildanus paid him a yearly tax of 5d., known as *cheþyn-gavell*, for the right of buying or selling in the borough, while the admission of new gildani was subject to his veto.¹⁵ The borough motes or courts were controlled by his bailiffs, fines which went to feed the Abbot's treasury being imposed for every breach of the law. In brief, the authority of the warden was nominal when compared with that of the Abbot, before whom alone might be borne the symbols of supremacy. The warden was merely allowed to have two tipped staves carried before him on state occasions by the Abbot's bailiffs.

For the first hundred years after the foundation of the monastery the Abbot appears to have enjoyed unquestioned supremacy and to have regarded the Guild with favour.¹⁶ Any privileges acquired by the latter were probably purchased from their feudal lord, who, at the cost of a strip of parchment, was able to increase his revenue and at the same time promote the material prosperity of the town.

In the reign of Henry III. however broke out a revolt against the supremacy of the Abbey, and a struggle, not unaccompanied by violence, for at least an instalment of that civic independence which other towns were enjoying. The Abbot, on the one part, relied on the various Charters

Struggle with the Guild Merchant

granted by the Founder and his successors as evidence of his prerogatives and jurisdiction. The burghers, on the other part, with self-conscious dignity, pleaded still more ancient privileges and rights of self-government, dating, they maintained, from the reign of Edward the Confessor and the days when Reading was a royal borough.¹⁷

By the year 1253 the dispute had grown so fierce that the burghers actually "lay in wait day and night for the Abbot's bailiffs," and "assaulted them in the execution of their office." For this offence the townsmen were cited into the Court of King's Bench and required to justify the privileges they claimed as members of the Guild.

Eventually peace was restored by the precept from King Henry III. to the Sheriff of Berks, disallowing the claims of the burgesses and upholding the supreme authority of the Abbot, the precept being followed by a Charter of Incorporation for the Guild, which the burghers succeeded in obtaining from the King. The provisions of this Guild Charter are as follows :

"Henry, by the grace of God, King of England etc. to all archbishops, bishops, abbots, earls, barons etc., greeting. Know ye that we will, and command for ourself and our heirs, that all the burgesses of Reading *who belong to the Guild Merchant in Reading* may be for ever free from all shires and hundred courts, and from all pleas, complaints, tolls, passages, ways, carriage ways, and that they may buy and sell wheresoever they will throughout all England, without paying toll, and no one may disturb them under forfeiture of 10 marks."

By this Charter, which forms a landmark in the municipal history of Reading, privileges which hitherto had been enjoyed on sufferance, receive complete legal sanction.

But in the following year (1254) a further quarrel arose, the matters in dispute being laid before the Court of King's Bench at Westminster. The burghers, on their part,

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accused the Abbot of having (1) dissolved the Guild Merchant, (2) compelled them to plead in his court instead of in their own Guild Hall, (3) changed the site of the Corn Market, and (4) exacted services which he had no right to demand. The Abbot, on his part, complained (1) of the contumacious conduct of the burghers, who had driven out and beaten his bailiff and other officers, (2) that the payment of *chepyn-gavell* had been refused, and (3) that the privileges conferred by the Abbey Charters had been violated.

As a result a "Final and endly concord" was drawn up, by which the burghers secured the right to hold their market in its accustomed place, to own their common Guild Hall, and to maintain their Guild Merchant as of old. In return for this amongst other concessions, the burgesses acknowledged the Abbot's right to select one of the gildani to be the *Custos Gilde* or Mayor, who should take an oath of fidelity to the burgesses as well as to the Abbot. Moreover, the latter might still tallage the town at certain times, while his bailiffs might hold their courts in the Guild Hall and fine the burgesses any reasonable sum for the benefit of the Abbot's treasury.

As this agreement left the control of local government as well as of trade in the hands of the Abbot, we need not wonder that ere long the restless townsfolk began to clamour for further liberty. It is possible also that they were seeking to escape from the jurisdiction of the Abbot's Manorial Court, under the Guild Charter of Henry III., which exempted them from all pleas. At any rate, in the Charter of Edward III., dated 1344 (which was an *Insperimus* of that of Henry III.), the privilege hitherto enjoyed by the burgesses of being "quit from all pleas" was withdrawn, probably at the instance of the Abbot, in order to prevent the Guild from evading his jurisdiction.

Thereupon the traditional feud broke out afresh, and matters came to a crisis in 1351, the mode of election of

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constables now being the chief point in dispute. The Mayor and burgesses declared that the Abbot had no *locus standi* in the matter, and actually refused to obey a constable appointed by the Abbot's steward. They further pleaded that they had been accustomed time out of mind to elect a proper and able person to be the Mayor, that they had a Guild Merchant, and that the Mayor aforesaid was accustomed to exercise jurisdiction over the burgesses and commonalty "according to the custom of the borough and Guild."

This agitation continued for many years, the fortunes of the contending parties alternating from time to time. Eventually the question was settled in favour of the town, at any rate for the moment, since we read that in 1417 the Mayor, Robert Morys, elected two constables in the hall of the Guild Merchant, and that these constables were admitted to office by one of the justices of the peace. In 1420 the burghers proceeded to erect a new Guild Hall close to the Hallowed Brook; but when a few years later they ventured to build a new out-butcher's and buy "smiting-stocks" for butchers living outside the town, the Abbot saw in it an attempt to limit his own market profits, seized the out-butcher's in 1430, and denied the right of the burgesses either to use or to receive rents from it.¹⁸

But in spite of such occasional rebuffs the Merchant Guild gradually improved its status, becoming recognised as the symbol of a common municipal life, and the safeguard of municipal freedom. The Mayor, although still appointed by the Abbot, identified himself more and more with the representatives of the town and led the revolt against abbatial arrogance.

Various fresh municipal Charters were also obtained about this time, showing that the Abbot's jurisdiction was gradually being restricted, and the privileges of the Merchant Guild confirmed. Thus Henry VI. gave permission to the Mayor to have a mace carried before him and in 1459 the mace was actually bought.

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This triumph however was too great to last, for soon afterwards the King wrote a letter to the Mayor revoking the privilege on the ground that "hit is contrarie to the franchise and libertees of our said church and monasterie, by our noble aunciesteres graunted and by us confirmed, you to be called or bere other in name or in signe other wise than as keeper of the Gilde of Reding, admitted by the abbot of our said monasterie, and not by us, for to have any mase, or eny other signe of officer or office to be born by you or any other man with in the said town and franchisse of Reding. Savyng oonly two tipped staffs to be born by the baylif of the abbot of oure said monasterie, graunted and yeven to the abbot and convent of the same our monasterie at the first foundac'on thereof."

Some years later (in 1480) the payment to the Abbot of *chepyn-gavell* was abolished, the money henceforth going into the town chest.

In 1487 was granted by King Henry VII. an important Guild Charter, *Majori et Burgensibus Radingiae*, this being the first Charter in which the Mayor is alluded to, a fact which shows the influential position he had now acquired. The Charter further conceded the right of electing two Sergeants-at-Mace to attend upon the Mayor, a privilege that had been refused by Henry VI., and granted the Mayor the right to the survey and correction of all the men employed in the cloth trade, provided that the Abbot received "the fines, pains, forfeitures, and all other profits arising from such correction." Lastly, the Mayor and burgesses were not to be summoned on Assize, Juries, Attaints, Recognitions or Inquisitions before Justices of Assize and Gaol Delivery, Justices of the Peace, or other Justices outside the borough.

This and other provisions of the Charter show what great strides has been made in the independent authority of the municipal body, which at length is allowed to enjoy some fruits of a hard-won victory. But even now peace

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was short-lived, for a little later the Abbot absolutely refused for a period of three or four years to appoint any "maister of the Gilde, otherwise called the Mayre," and took upon himself to admit "simple and perjured persons to the office of constable, who in nothing regarded the good rule of the town." The result was that "mysruled people dayly encresed and contynued, as carders, disers, hasardes, vacabonds, and mony oder unlawfull gamys were used as wele by nyght as by day."

Naturally this roused the wrath of the burgesses, who, in 1498, elected one Richard Cleche as Mayor, while he on his part "desired certain burgesses to help to see such misruled people punished . . . until matters were settled with the Abbot."

In 1500 however the inhabitants were again defeated in their efforts to elect their Mayor, and a fresh appeal was made to the judgment of King's Court.

In this appeal the Abbot triumphed, and in 1507, when a decree was passed by the Justices of the Common Pleas, declaring the Mayor and burgesses of the Guild Merchant to be corporate, the only power granted is that "the Burgeses of the seide Gylde shalle name and present iij^e good and able Burgeses of the seid Gylde to the seid Abbot yerely in the fest of Seynt Mychaelle th' Archaungell; . . . and in the same Monastery desyer and pray the same Abbot, if he be present, or in his seide absens the Pryour Chamberer, or Subchamberer, to chose and admytt one of the same iij^e persones to be Keper of the seid Gylde." The two constables and the ten wardmen of the five wards might indeed be elected by the Mayor and burgesses, but they must be sworn in before the Abbot.

We can well imagine how the hearts of the brave burghers must have sunk at the endless rebuffs they had encountered. No vision revealed the great emancipation that was so soon to strike off their fetters. No soothsayer foretold that another Henry would be crowned who was to overthrow

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the mighty edifice which the first Henry had built so many centuries ago.

This brief history of a struggle extending over two hundred and fifty years brings us almost down to the dissolution of the Abbey, and illustrates how the galling yoke of a powerful ecclesiastical corporation hampered the growth of liberty and the natural rights of self-government. It is true that the burghers failed to release themselves from the grip of their feudal lord; nevertheless much success had been gained, and many of the cherished prerogatives of the monastery had been lost during the strife. But it was not until the voice of the Abbot was silenced in death and the Abbey had been dissolved that the burgesses obtained from King Henry VIII. the emancipation they had so long striven for. Then at length dawned the day of liberty, and in the Charter of Incorporation of 1542 the Mayor and burgesses were constituted the governing body of the town, with full executive authority and jurisdiction. The long-drawn struggle with feudal and ecclesiastical forces ended in the triumph of the people. Reading played a worthy part in the battle for freedom which has done so much for the elevation of England.



xi

The Dissolution of the Abbey

“The Abbot Redyng to be sent down to be tried *and* executed at Redyng with his complices.”

Cromwell's “Remembrances”

VERY dramatic was the fall of the famous Abbey which for over four centuries had played so important a rôle on the stage of our national history. Its mitred Abbot, the Peer of Parliament, the favourite of his King, was doomed to die a traitor's death, his Abbey to become a scene of desolation.

i. The Coming Storm

England of the sixteenth century was stirred by many forces that did not exist in the twelfth. The revival of learning, the spirit of enquiry, the spread of the printing press, the development of municipal life were opening a fresh chapter in the life of the people. The spiritual fervour of the religious houses had dwindled to a vanishing point, and had been replaced by superstition, indolence and self-indulgence. Many of the houses were reputed immoral and corrupt, opposed to the revival of letters, and exhibiting the faults of institutions that had outlived their day. The veneration once felt for them had given

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place to strong dislike, shared both by King and people. In earlier centuries English monasteries had been strongholds of patriotism ; in the sixteenth they relied on the Pope for protection and had become alienated from national feeling.

At Reading itself the brethren were no longer as of yore “a noble pattern of holiness.” The Hospitium, once far-famed for its hospitality to the pilgrim and the wayfarer, had been converted into the Royal Grammar School of Henry VII., a conversion significant of the changes that were coming over the land. The almshouse for poor sisters was disused. The leper house, a noble charity founded centuries ago by the good Abbot Aucherius, had closed its doors. Leprosy, it is true, was extinct ; yet many of the other diseases such as lupus and cancer formerly tended in the lazarus-house were as prevalent as ever. More than once do we read of a mismanaged treasury and of abbots and almoners negligent of their duty. Even the faith in relics, once so potent a charm for the ills of mankind, had lost its efficacy.

The heavy indictment brought against the religious houses was certainly not wholly true. But even if it were there could be no sufficient excuse for the illegal and scandalous treatment of the Abbey or for the barbarous fate meted out to Hugh Cook Faringdon.

Among proximate causes of the dissolution of the monasteries an important place must be given to the Act of Supremacy, passed in 1534, which made Henry VIII. “on earth Supreme Head of the Church of England,” and transferred the right of visitation of the monasteries from the Papacy to the Crown. Following on this came the appointment of Thomas Cromwell as Vicegerent of the King in all matters ecclesiastical.

During the momentous struggle with the Pope, when the religious houses showed themselves hostile to the King’s designs, while their vast wealth aroused his cupidity,

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Cromwell proved a willing and crafty lieutenant for carrying out the policy of dissolution; he saw a gold-mine in the monastic property which if worked would yield a rich profit to the royal treasury.

It was in 1536 that the Act of Parliament was passed dissolving the smaller monasteries, viz. religious houses which possessed an annual income of less than £200, the Act being based on the assurance of the King that evil lives were being led in such smaller monasteries. Of this, says the preamble to the Act, Henry "had knowledge . . . as well by the 'compertes' of his late visitation as by sundry credible informations." As a further reason it was stated that the religious in the smaller monasteries would be useful to swell the ranks of "divers and great solemn monasteries of the realm (wherein, thanks be to God, religion is right well kept and observed)."

No less than 376 monasteries were suppressed as a result of this Act, the value of their lands being £32,000 a year, while the spoils of the houses yielded to the King's purse were estimated at £100,000. The political disturbances in the north, where the monks had been more popular than further south, somewhat checked the progress of the dissolutions. But when the insurgents had been crushed, the rising was used as an excuse for further suppressions.

Hitherto the attainder of an Abbot for treason had not been held to affect the property of the Abbey over which he ruled. But the King now decided to confiscate such property as part of the punishment imposed on the Abbot for supposed or real treason, and on this plea several of the larger monasteries were dealt with, although according to the Act of 1536 only those with a yearly income of under £200 could be suppressed.

In order to obtain the sanction of Parliament for these further measures, a Bill was introduced in April 1539 covering the illegal suppression of the greater monasteries, and granting to the King all "Abbathies, Priories etc.,

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which hereafter shall happen to be dissolved, suppressed, renounced, relinquished, forfeited, given up or come into the King's Highness." There is also a parenthesis referring to such others as "shall happen to come to the King's Highness by attainder or attainders of treason." These Henry and his heirs were to hold for ever, any house subsequently surrendered or dissolved being similarly treated. As soon as this Act was passed, further attacks on the monasteries were commenced. By threats or by promises, or failing these by accusation of treason, the Abbots of three of the largest Abbeys, viz. Glastonbury, Colchester and Reading, were similarly and almost simultaneously dealt with.

ii. The Dissolution of the Abbey

It was in August 1538 that Dr. John London arrived in Reading. He was one of the royal commissioners for the visitation of monasteries, and soon became notorious for the wholesale desecration he carried out. On August 31st he wrote to Thomas Cromwell that Peter Schefford, warden of the Grey Friars at Reading, desired licence for his friars "to change their garments," i.e. to abandon their monastic habit. The warden's request appears to have been immediately granted, since the Friary was surrendered by September 13th. By the 14th the Church, the windows of which were "full of friars," images, altars and dorter had been defaced, and the friars turned out of doors in secular apparel.

The famous shrine at Caversham was also treated with scant ceremony. By September 17th, 1538, the famous silver image of the Virgin Mary had been pulled down and nailed up in a chest, ready to be sent by barge to Cromwell's house in London, the three coats, cap and hair of the image being also despatched. The renowned figure of an angel was similarly treated, "the lights, shrowds, crutches,

The Dissolution of the Abbey

images of wax etc. about the Chapel" being all defaced. The only relic that escaped was a reputed "piece of the holy halter Judas was hanged with," which may have been hidden from the spoiler.

This treatment of the Grey Friars and of Caversham must have caused profound anxiety to Hugh Faringdon, and well indeed they might, for Dr. London seized the opportunity of his visit to Reading to inquire what the Abbot's views might be on the question of surrendering the Abbey. On September 14th, 1538, he wrote to Cromwell that the Abbot "said, as they all do, he was at the King's command, but loth be they to come to any free surrender." Three days later London promised to send to Cromwell by his servant "a token in parchment under the convent seal from the Abbot and convent." Unhappily it is not known what this said "token" was. By September 18th he had required the Abbot to show him the relics, which was willingly done, and after making an inventory had locked them up behind the high altar. The Abbot's reply and his readiness to exhibit the relics (if London's account can be trusted) seem to show that at this time he was not altogether unwilling to consider the question of a surrender, and this feeling possibly London wished to strengthen by the favourable report he made to Cromwell on the state of the Abbey. "They have," he writes, "a good lecture in Scripture daily read in the Chapter House, both in English and Latin."

Doubtless Faringdon had many searchings of heart as to his duty during the next few months. But when once his conscience told him to remain loyal to the Pope as Supreme Head of the Church, all hesitation seems to have vanished. Between May 19th, 1539, when the Act dealing with the monasteries was passed, and the following September Faringdon appears to have been again sounded as to whether he would voluntarily surrender his Abbey into the King's hands. Neither threats of violence nor promises

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of generous treatment however induced compliance. A fresh charge was therefore invented, viz. loyalty to the Holy See, such loyalty implying a denial of the King's spiritual supremacy, and being treated as equivalent to treason. Faringdon was too convinced a catholic to deny his faith in the Pope. Accordingly he was arrested about September 17th and imprisoned in the Tower. There he probably formed one of a group of prisoners including the Abbots of Glastonbury and Colchester, who communicated with each other by means of a blind harper named William Moore, and encouraged each other to resist the King.

As a Peer of the realm Faringdon should have been arraigned before Parliament on a charge of treason. But no trial under attaingder took place, and he was condemned to the death of a traitor as a result of secret inquisitions in the Tower. Indeed there is evidence that Cromwell, regardless of justice, sent Faringdon to a trial of which the verdict was already determined. The trial in fact was nothing more than a ghastly mockery of justice, for in the "Remembrances" written with Cromwell's own hand, we read, "The Abbot Redyng (sic) to be sent down to be tried and executed at Redyng with his complices."

After being imprisoned for about two months Faringdon was brought down to Reading, and underwent in his own hall of justice what was nothing more than a sham trial. Then followed the final scene on the 15th of November, 1539, before the Gateway of his own stately Abbey (Fig. ix.).*

* Fig. ix. This scene, based on the painting by Mr. Harry Morley and entitled "The Martyrdom of Hugh Faringdon," represents the barbarous death that was formerly meted out to traitors. The victim is seen tied to a hurdle, before being dragged through the streets. Close by are the scaffold and other accessories required for the execution of a traitor during the Middle Ages.

Hugh Faringdon forms the central figure, while close by kneels a priest holding a crucifix. Not far off stand two other monks who suffered the same penalty as the Abbot.

To the left is seen Thomas Mirth, the mayor, with the two burgesses of Parliament, Thomas Vachell and John Raymond.



FIG. IV.—THE MARTYRDOM OF HUGH FARINGDON.

The Dissolution of the Abbey

With a rope round his neck the great Lord Abbot stood at the foot of the gibbet and addressed the crowd that had flocked to witness the last scene of a great tragedy. He spoke of the cause for which he was about to die—" fidelity to the See of Rome and the common faith of those who had the best right to know what was the true teaching of the English Church." During life his motto had been " In te Domine, speravi," and that faith robbed death of all its terror.

This over, the sentence of hanging, with its barbarous accessories was carried out. Two other monks, John Eynon and John Rugg, probably tried on a similar charge, were executed at the same time. The co-workers during life were linked in death.

The execution of Hugh Faringdon was followed by the immediate dissolution of the Abbey. Ere long commenced the dismantling of the fabric. The treasury was plundered ; the plate, vestments and tapestries were forwarded to London by Cromwell's direction for the King's use. The lead from the Church roof was melted into pigs and fodders. The pillars, the tiles and the woodwork were scattered far and wide. Some of the conventional buildings were converted into a palace, and used until 1625 on the occasion of royal visits. After this the demolition proceeded rapidly, as will be more fully described in the next chapter. Little indeed did the citizens of Reading care for the noble house of God whose sweet bells had tolled through the centuries, raising the thoughts of world-weary souls from earth to heaven.



xii

The Old Order Changeth

“Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee, is burned with fire ; and all our pleasant things are laid waste.”

Isaiah lxiv.

ASTRANGE fate has transformed the *nobile et regale monasterium de Redinge* which Henry Beauclerc founded on the banks of the Thames into the scarred lichen-covered ruins that survive to-day. The sumptuous Church which for centuries had rung with the praises of the eternal and petitions for the mortal has been battered by artillery, blown up by gunpowder and dug out as a common quarry for the paving of the streets.

The vast monastic buildings have in great measure disappeared, the surviving remains having been stripped of their fretted stone and robbed of their ornament. Vanished are tracery and transom, mullion and moulding, shaft and capital. But happily enough remains to assist the visitor to reconstruct in imagination Reading's historic Abbey, and to teach the lesson that even royal foundations dedicated for ever to the Almighty may have their day and cease to be. And Henry's foundation still lives on in other forms and still helps to mould human lives and to foster high ideals of service.

Although parts of the Abbey were immediately dismantled, the principal monastic buildings remained entire for a number of years. Henry VIII. converted some of them into a royal palace and frequently resided there.

The Old Order Changeth

Edward VI., Queen Mary and Philip of Spain also visited Reading, while in 1572 Queen Elizabeth spent some days in a portion of the old monastery, which became known as "Queen's House."

In 1625 raged the great plague in London, causing a general exodus to the provinces of all persons who were able to escape. As a result Charles I. kept the Michaelmas term at Reading, when the Abbey was for the last time occupied as a palace. The several Courts of Justice appear to have been held in various portions of the Abbey: that of King's Bench in the great Hall, the Court of the Exchequer in the Town Hall and the Court of Augmentation in the school house.

In 1643 occurred the memorable siege of Reading by the Parliamentary forces, consisting of about 16,000 foot and over 3,000 horse, commanded by the Earl of Essex. The town was held on behalf of the King by 3,000 men and a regiment of about 300 horse, under Sir Arthur Aston, until its capture by Essex, the ancient dormitory of the Hospitium of St. John being used as barracks by the garrison.

During the siege, which raged furiously for ten days, the walls of the Abbey were to a great extent demolished by artillery placed a short distance off. Within the monastic precincts a fort, composed of earth and rubbish, was erected by the engineers, its ramparts extending across the cloisters and the nave of the church from north to south, and terminating in a sort of hornwork commanding the Thames and the adjacent meadows. This defensive work must have involved the destruction of about three-fourths of the length of the nave. Near these ramparts, close to where the north transept joined the nave, a mine seems to have been sprung, hurling vast blocks of stonework into their present positions.

During the further military operations that succeeded the surrender of the town, the fortifications appear to have been demolished, soon however to be replaced by fresh ones.

Octocentenary of Reading Abbey

These are only a few landmarks in a long story, details of which will be found in monographs on the Abbey.

Fortunately however Reading still possesses some priceless *reliquiae* of her ancient Abbey, memorials of which any community might well be proud.

Firstly, some small portions of the conventional buildings are still in use for municipal and other purposes. Thus the borough is enriched by Henry Beauclerc's foundation. The stately Inner Gateway in which the Abbot formerly held his manorial Court, and in which Hugh Faringdon was condemned to death, still survives; for many years it served as the home of the Berkshire Archaeological Society. A portion of the dormitory of the Hospitium of St. John, although largely restored, is used for public offices.

Secondly, there still survive some majestic ruins which are rich in historical associations, and amongst those ruins is the plot of ground just before the high altar where was laid to rest the great Founder himself.

Thirdly, Reading still possesses two important educational Institutions which, though no longer occupying any portion of the Abbey site, still in various ways carry on its traditions.

The oldest of these is Reading School, formerly known as the "Abbeye School." This school has been in existence for about eight centuries and for many years has ranked high amongst the grammar schools of England. Indeed the school may possibly be even older than the Abbey and have originally belonged to the Canons of a collegiate Church. When the Abbey was founded the school was doubtless granted to the Abbot, under whose control Reading itself was placed. At the dissolution of the monastery the school passed to the Crown and became in a sense a royal school. During its long history it has produced "very able men to do God, the King and the Church service," and all who value the influence of noble traditions in education will subscribe to the hope that a long and useful future may be in store. *Floreat Schola Readingensis in plurimos annos!*

The Old Order Changeth

The University College is a much younger institution, having been incorporated as recently as 1896. At that time it was located in the restored Hospitium of the Abbey, which thus reverted to noble purposes seven centuries after its erection by Abbot Hugh II. The association of the College with the Abbey is further indicated by the incorporation in its arms of the three escallops which formed the arms of the Abbey and were borne in honour of St. James the Elder, the acquisition of whose reputed hand by Henry Beauclerc led to the foundation of the Abbey.

The College has undergone a process of rapid development. In 1901 it was placed amongst the national institutions recognised by the State as performing work of university standard. Before long the Hospitium and the adjacent buildings which had been absorbed grew inadequate, and in 1905 the College migrated to the ampler site which it now occupies. There are expectations that the charter of a full-fledged University will soon be granted. With this will be associated academic independence and the power to mould the curricula of its students on the lines of the most modern requirements.

Although the ideals of the two educational Institutions just mentioned differ widely from those of the Abbey, yet there are many points of contact between them. In its day the monastery was the library of the scholar, the studio of the artist, the laboratory of the scientist, the museum of the collector, the seminary of the young. All these form part of a modern educational institution. Both the old and the new have as their programme the imparting of instruction, the training of character, the advancement of learning.

Reading Abbey therefore still lives on in visible memorials, which are enriched by it and which recall the part it has played in the building up of "this dear, dear land, this England." Truly the name of Henry Beauclerc "on fame's eternall bead-roll is worthie to be fyled."

The Epilogue

"Strong towers decay, but a great name shall never pass away."
P. Benjamin

IF historical associations rank amongst the most precious possessions of a community, Reading may indeed be counted as amongst the most favoured of towns. Her annals are inextricably interwoven with the religious, political and social history of the British nation. May her past achievements prove a perpetual stimulus to high ideals of life and service!

It is no small privilege to be able to linger on the spot where in 1136 King Henry I. was laid to rest, where in 1164 the great Archbishop Becket dedicated the Abbey Church to the worship of God for ever and ever, where in 1185 Heraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, kneeled before Henry of Anjou imploring him to undertake a crusade in order to rescue Jerusalem from Saladin, where *ca.* 1240 the musical though anonymous monk wrote down "Sumer is icumen in" for our perpetual delight; where in 1359 John of Gaunt was married to his fair cousin Blanche of Lancaster in the presence of Edward the Third; and where in 1539 the last Abbot of Reading was martyred *pro Christo et ecclesia*.

The memories thus awakened will fan the flame of patriotism and kindle the desire to carry on, as far as strength permits, the traditions which our forefathers have committed to our care.

Happily—in spite of medieval vandalism and modern cupidity—Reading retains memorials and institutions which recall the many centuries that have passed since the beginnings of Radingia, and serve to illustrate for the rising generation the development of education, of art, of science, of industry, of music, of poetry. All such memorials and institutions should be preserved with jealous affection, since they form instructive object-lessons for both young and old.

"Oh ye who dwell
Around yon ruins, guard the precious charge
From hands profane. Oh! save the sacred pile
O'er which the wing of centuries has flown
Darkly and silently . . . from the ruthless grasp
Of future violation."

Carrington

The influence of the Abbey on the borough that has grown up beneath its shadow has been far-reaching. Henry

The Epilogue

Beauclerc's foundation has indeed in a large measure been the making of Reading, bringing industry and commerce, setting high standards of education and learning, inculcating principles of self-sacrificing hospitality and charity to the poor, the homeless, the pilgrim, the leper. A wide outlook on national questions has been encouraged ; the life of the burgh has been brought into touch with the life of England. Much of the seed sown by Henry Beauclerc has borne good fruit which one generation after another has garnered. On the other hand it must not be forgotten that ecclesiastical domination hampers the free and unfettered development of the spirit of man. Until the voice of the Abbot was silenced civic liberty and self-government were little more than nominal. Even the methods of monastic charity were injudicious and short-sighted. They relieved symptoms, but did little to remove the causes of social distress. In fact they perpetuated the disease they wished to cure.

In these days of luxury and materialism even the ruins of holy buildings that have been consecrated for centuries to the worship of God bear a witness to the everlasting craving for the presence of God, and to the conviction that in very truth He comes to dwell amongst men. There is a benediction for those whose souls are attuned to quiet voices that come down to us from past centuries and remind us of the brevity, mystery and solemnity of life.

If we look back from our present point of vantage at the long drama of eight hundred years, we cannot but lament, both on local and on national grounds, that no constructive policy was associated with the dissolution of the Abbey. A far-sighted statesmanship might have adapted Henry Beauclerc's great foundation to the changed conditions of the times.

The historic Church might have been converted into a Cathedral for Berkshire, some of the monastic revenues being assigned to the endowment of a bishopric. Other endowments might have been diverted for the founding of professorships at the Universities as well as to the permanent maintenance of the ancient "Abbey School."

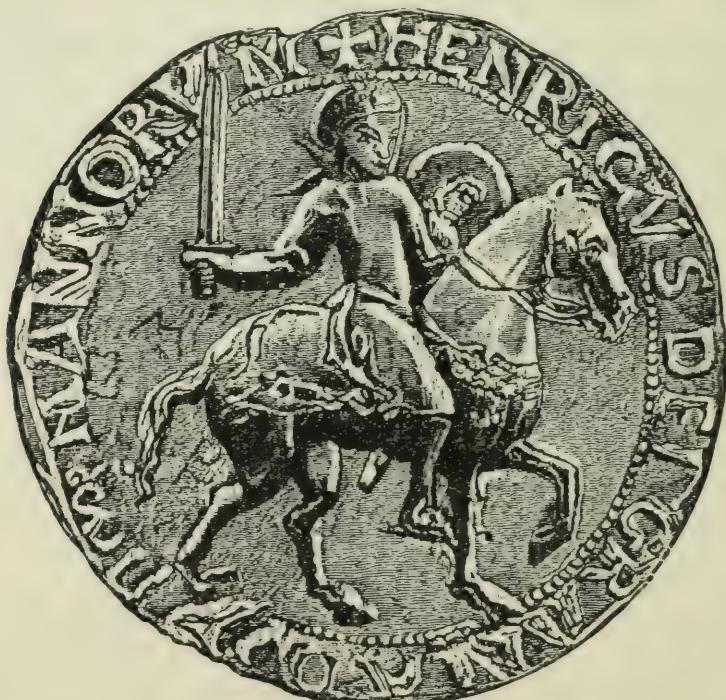
The Hospitium might have been retained as an alms-house and an orphanage. The disused Leper House might have been converted into a hospital for the sick, the blind,

The Epilogue

the halt. The monastic Library, of which some illuminated MSS. worth their weight in gold are still extant, might have formed the nucleus of the Public Library for which the borough has had to wait so long. The ancient Hall of Justice in the Inner Gateway, together with the Compter Prison, might have continued in use for judicial purposes. The monastic estates would have formed splendid parks.

By some such programme as this the ideals of the royal founder would have been adapted to modern ideals, and the religious, charitable, educational and literary work of the Abbey would have been perpetuated. Instead of scandalous desecration of buildings that had for centuries been devoted to noble purposes, we should have seen those ideals maintained and developed. A great religious foundation, closely associated with our national history, would have been preserved.

Doubtless there will for ever be diversity of judgment as to the policy of Henry VIII. and the dissolution of the monasteries, and there is much to be said on both sides of the question. But all must agree that the indebtedness of this ancient borough to its Abbey is one that can never be repaid, and Reading will hold in everlasting remembrance that ancient home of religion and learning whose history is inextricably intertwined with her own.



Great Seal of Henry 3.

M o t e s *

¹ In the Reading Museum are fifteen Norman capitals and two voussoirs which Mr. C. E. Keyser discovered at Holme Park, Sonning, and which may have been derived from the open arcade of the cloisters.

² For fuller particulars of Hugh de Boves and Hugh Cook Faringdon, cf. *Hugh de Boves and Hugh Cook Faringdon, first and last Abbots of Reading*, by J. B. H. An account of Hugh II. will be found in the *Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archaeological J.*, 1915, p. 109. An excellent account of Hugh de Boves is also given by Hébert, *Revue des Questions Historiques*, 1898, Oct.

F. A. Gasquet tells the story of Hugh Cook Faringdon in *The Last Abbot of Glastonbury and other Essays*, p. 12.

A fourth Abbot, William the Templar, appointed in 1164, was afterwards consecrated Archbishop of Bordeaux and also figures frequently in history, more especially in connection with the baronial revolt of 1173-4. Cf. *William the Templar*, by J. B. H., *Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archaeological J.*, 1916, p. 108.

³ Abbot Hugh paid a visit to St. Edmundsbury probably in 1200, and Sir E. Clarke suggests that this may have been by way of leave-taking before taking up the Abbacy of Cluny. Cf. *Chronica Jocelini de Brakelonda*, ed. by Rokewood, p. 92; Clarke, *Chronicle of John of Brakelond*, pp. 189, 252.

On a subsequent occasion Abbot Hugh paid a visit to Lewes in the hope of settling a quarrel at the priory of St. Pancras. Cf. *Millénaire de Cluny*, I., p. 336.

⁴ J. H. Pignot, *L'Ordre de Cluny*, II., p. 315.

⁵ F. A. Gasquet, *English Monastic Life*, p. 111.

⁶ J. C. Robertson, *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket (Rolls)*, I., p. 417.

⁷ J. C. Robertson, *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket (Rolls)*, I., p. 416.

⁸ For further particulars cf. E. J. Climenon, *Memorials of Old Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Ditchfield, p. 35; *The Shrine of St. James at Reading Abbey*, by J. B. H., *The Antiquary*, 1915, Oct.

⁹ Byron, *Childe Harold*.

¹⁰ Further details of the ancestry of these combatants will be found in "The Trial by Combat of Henry de Essex and Robert de Montfort," by J. B. H.

¹¹ Carlyle, *Past and Present*, ch. xiv.

* These references must be regarded as merely supplementary to those given in the author's other works on the Abbey.

Notes

¹² Further particulars, together with a facsimile of the Canon, will be found in "*Sumer is icumen in*," by J. B. H.

¹³ The Cathedral here referred to was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666.

¹⁴ Matthew of Westminster, *Flores Historiarum* (Rolls), I., p. 442. Yonge, in his edition of the *Flowers of History*, I., p. 420, speaks of "the royal town which is called Reading" (A.D. 871).

¹⁵ It is curious to note that the gildani, so clamant for commercial liberty for themselves, imposed onerous restrictions on the "foreigner" or *forenseci*, i.e. on non-gildani. This applied for instance to the right to sell corn, leather, linen or woollen cloth. Some of these restrictions however were relaxed during the great fairs, possibly because of the rich gains these brought to the monastic treasury. C. Gross, *The Gild Merchant*, I., p. 45.

¹⁶ As regards the privileges of burgesses, gildani and *forenseci* and their relative importance in municipal history, cf. C. Gross, *l.c.*, I., ch. v., vi.

¹⁷ The society of guild merchants of Reading existed before the foundation of the Abbey and claimed a charter from Edward the Confessor. The number of burghers in the guild seems to have been very small. Even so late as 1486 only 28 paid *chepyn-gavell*. C. Coates, *History of Reading*, pp. 49, 58.

¹⁸ It is interesting to contrast the extraordinary difficulties which hampered the attainment of political and commercial self-government at Reading with the easy progress of royal towns, such as Norwich and Leicester, which were never subject to a feudal lord. Green, *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century*, I., ch. vii.

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